OCTOBER 1990

THE UNESCO COURIER

EXILES

INTERVIEW WITH
WERNER ARBER
NOBEL LAUREATE (1978)

HERITAGE:
THE MEDINA OF FEZ

ENVIRONMENT:
THE PHILIPPINES' LAST FRONTIER

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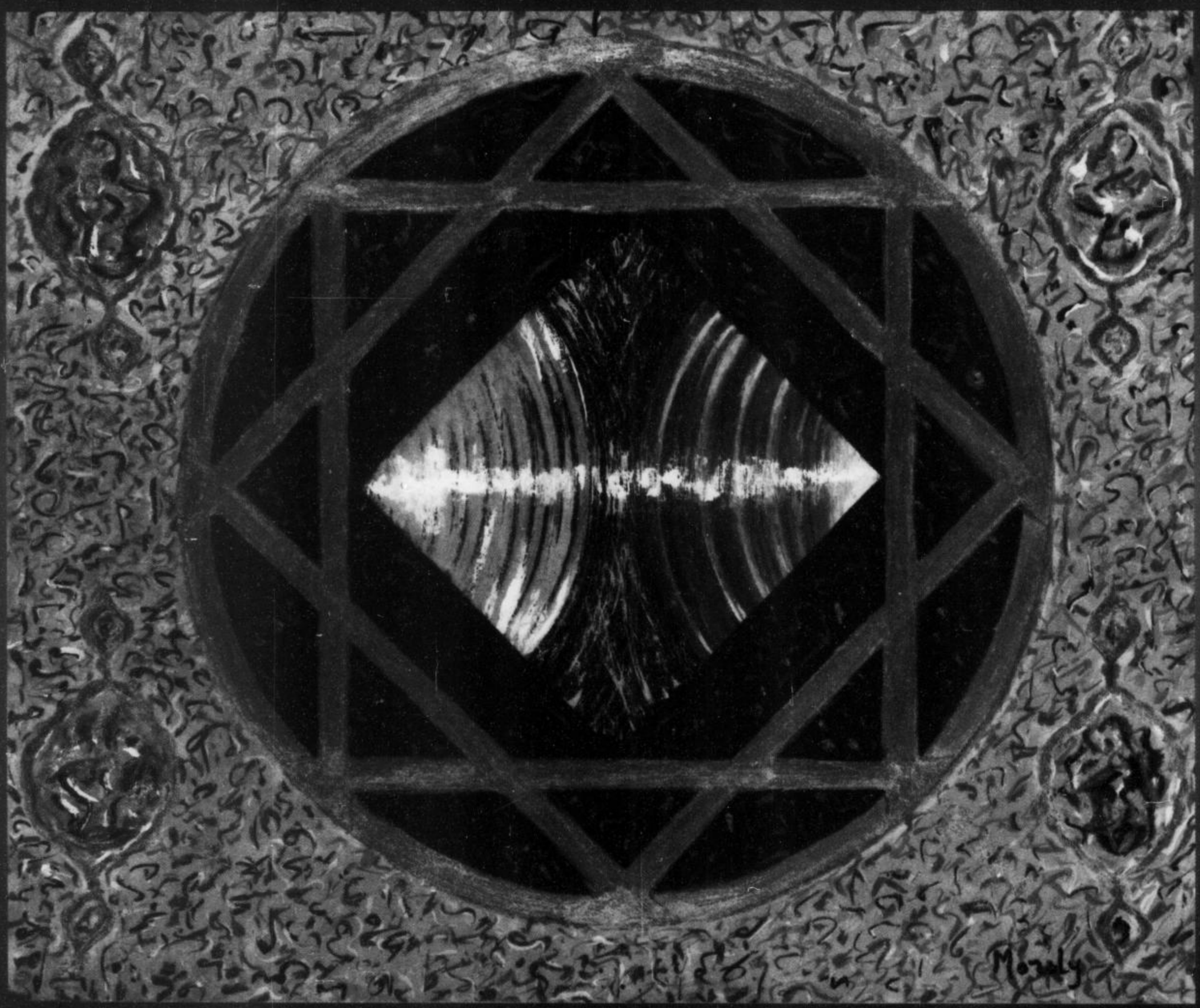
E N C O U N T E R S

We invite readers to send us photographs to be considered for publication in this feature. Your photo should show a painting, a sculpture, piece of architecture or any other subject which seems to be an example of cross-fertilization between cultures. Alternatively, you could send us pictures of two works from different cultural backgrounds in which you see some striking connection or resemblance. Please add a short caption to all photographs.



Two worlds in the Mediterranean
1995, oil on cardboard-backed canvas
(55 cm. x 46 cm.)
by Fadila Morsly

This painting by Algerian artist Fadila Morsly is an evocation of the quest for "a common destiny" in the Mediterranean basin by Muslim and Western civilizations, each with its long history. The two worlds face each other against the backcloth of a "turbid Mediterranean", but are "traversed by a ray of fruitful solidarity, like a laser beam symbolizing modernity". They are enclosed in a matrix of signs both formal (square, eight-pointed star, semi-circle) and informal (arabesques) evoking contact between cultures and "a moment of questing and truth".

THE UNESCO COURIER

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EXILES

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Michel Claude / UNESCO

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The medina of Fez (*Morocco*).
The historic district of a great metropolis is being carefully restored (p. 36).

Couver: ***Blue crowd*** **(1995), a computer-generated design by Diana Ong.**
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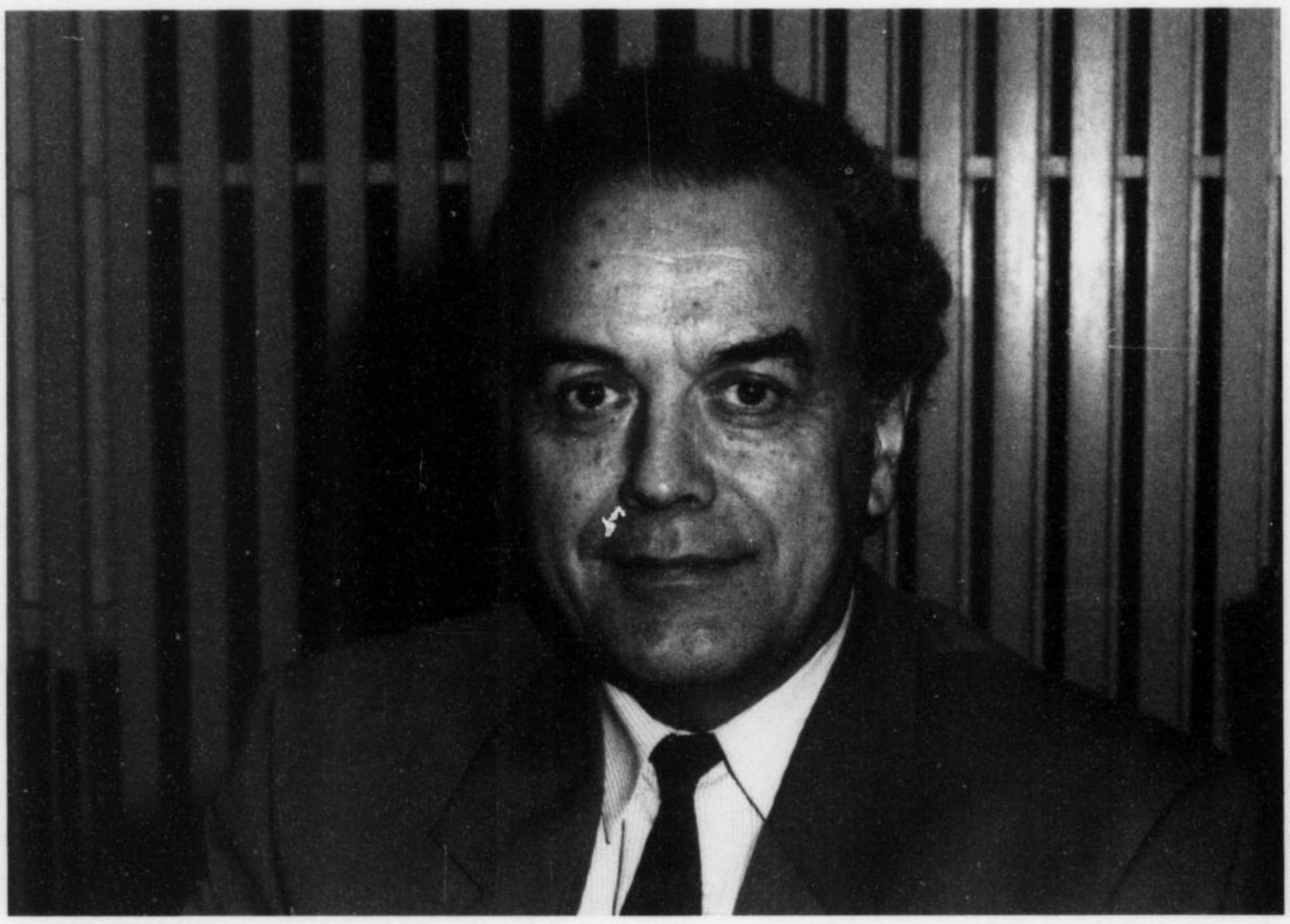
interview

Werner Arber

Biodiversity is a guarantee of evolution



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Swiss microbiologist Werner Arber shared the 1978 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine with Daniel Nathans and Hamilton Smith for their discovery of enzymes that protect bacteria against viral infections. Known as the restriction and modification system, it has proved to be extremely useful in molecular biology and genetic engineering. In this interview with Serafín García Ibañez, Werner Arber talks about the relations between science and society, especially questions arising from advances in genetics.

■ **What is biodiversity?**

Werner Arber: There are an estimated 10 million animal species in the world. Biodiversity is widely regarded as referring to diversity of species. But there is also great genetic diversity within each species. And ecosystems that are home to a large number of different species also contain an equally large variety from one place to another. All this is biodiversity.

■ **Not all of these species have been identified, have they?**

W. A.: Far from it. A lot of them are unknown to us. About four million of them have been

listed, if that; everything depends on geographical location, habitat and type of organism. A lot of micro-organisms, for example, which are my speciality, have not been described because they can't be cultivated in the laboratory. The only ones we know well are those that can be studied in vitro.

■ **So, many species are born and disappear without our knowing about them?**

W. A.: Biodiversity is the result of a long process of biological evolution that continually produces new genetic forms. So it is clear that in the past living beings have disappeared, and that more will be born in future the like of which this planet has never seen. A new species is the fruit of numerous mutations that occur in successive and distinct stages. Biodiversity as we know it today is not static; it reflects the world as it is at a given moment, and its composition changes constantly.

■ **What is a mutation?**

W. A.: It is a change in the sequence of a DNA molecule. A sequence is the linear repetition of the four base elements (which are designated by the letters A, C, G and T) in this molecule, which contains genetic information. A mutation occurs when one letter replaces another, either by cancelling or by inserting one of these letters at certain places in the sequence. With the help of specific enzymes, entire segments of this tiny piece of DNA can be rearranged.

■ **How can we protect species we don't even know exist?**

W. A.: The best way to protect them is to keep their living conditions—whatever they may be—stable. But that's easier said than done. How is it possible to keep living conditions absolutely stable? A host of changes, not counting those caused by people, can modify the temperature, the humidity rate or any other parameter of the environment, so that living conditions on the planet are never entirely stable.

■ **When we attack viruses—which we automatically assume to be harmful—can we be sure that they are not vital for other ecosystems and even for the preservation of biodiversity as a whole?**

W. A.: People imagine on the basis of their own experience that micro-organisms are their enemies because some micro-organisms cause diseases. It has to be accepted, however, that the great majority of these micro-organisms are very useful, not only to people but to nature in general. They can, for example, break down certain toxins very quickly.

■ **Are we not, therefore, playing with fire by trying to change and improve certain forms of life through biotechnologies?**

W. A.: Risks are always involved in this kind of application, but there are ways of controlling them. We must accept responsibility for establishing long-term strategies, in several stages, so that these risks can be assessed through experimentation.

■ **Can science today create life from inorganic matter?**

W. A.: No. Several theories currently seek to explain how certain biorganic molecules are produced by physico-chemical reactions, but this is still a far cry from being able to create a being endowed with the functions necessary for what is called life, namely metabolism, reproduction, assimilation and so forth. But not all scientists agree on this subject. Some think that in the near future science will have advanced to the point where we shall know more about the mechanisms of life and perhaps even be able to partly construct a living entity in the laboratory. Others, including myself, think that life is more complicated, and none of this is feasible in the near future. I am always fascinated by the elegance of certain molecular mechanisms, and I feel we should think ourselves very fortunate to be able to understand nature and watch it at work.

■ **The progress of research in human and plant genetics opens up all kinds of**

Some of the fears associated with the applications of genetics arise from the fact that some scientists overestimate their powers.

interview

© Michel Claude/Unesco

Werner Arber

speculation. What do you think of people's hopes and fears in this respect?

W. A.: We should be sceptical about the claims of certain scientists. In the 1950s and 1960s we heard promises that it would soon be possible to cure cancer. It's the same story today with the Aids virus. It was thought that once the virus was identified, it would only be a matter of time before the disease could be treated. But it's not as simple as that. And as far as the fears are concerned, as I've said, it is a matter of responsibility, for we can assess by means of experimentation the risks involved in a given application. There is no general rule; we have to proceed on a case-by-case basis. It is also true that some fears associated with the applications of genetics arise from the fact that some scientists overestimate their powers and claim that anything is possible, whereas in reality things are much more complicated.

■ **Do research and researchers need a normative framework?**

W. A.: I think it's important to define standards that should be respected, and also that these standards should be revised from time to time. Some applications may prove useful and even necessary. Others may be dangerous. All the factors should be taken into account.

■ **Biodiversity is no respecter of frontiers. Is international agreement needed to preserve it?**

W. A.: I think that a certain biodiversity is necessary for evolution. If too many biological functions were to disappear in a short period of time, it would take a long time—thousands of years—before some of them reappeared. Knowing that species disappear partly because of physical and chemical changes in their environment (in temperature or humidity rates, for example) and that the activities of our civilization have an impact on these changes at the planetary level, awareness of the problems must be world-wide. If one state makes a decision without consulting the others, it doesn't help anyone. We must act together, we must co-operate. We cannot bring the economic machine to a standstill, but we must, for example, devote the smallest possible area of land to food production. Above all—and this is the major problem—we must reduce air and water pollution.

■ **Do you think there is a limit to the numbers of people the planet can feed?**

W. A.: There are two possible answers to this question, but first of all you have to define a humanly acceptable quality of life. What criteria should be adopted? Those of the industrialized countries or those of countries with a traditional economy? In the latter case, the figures may vary, but in the former—and it is clear that most human beings would prefer this way of life—there are already too many of us for the planet's resources.

■ **Our world seems increasingly dependent on technological and scientific data. Should scientists play a more important role in states' political and decision-making machinery?**

W. A.: Research is a full-time job that leaves hardly any time for anything else. As far as I'm concerned, I think it's a good thing that politics are the concern of another category of the population than researchers, but contacts between the two categories could be a lot more fruitful than they are at present. Some aspects of scientific research also have implications that go further than mere technological applications, forming part of the broader field of philosophy and its use in helping us to understand our world. To take one example, molecular genetics teaches us that certain genes involved in mutations are involved on a random rather than a consistent basis. Nevertheless, these genes are necessary not only for the short lifespan of the individual but also for the evolution of the population as a whole, so that it can adapt to other environmental conditions that may possibly develop. This is the kind of information that it would be instructive to integrate into our picture of the world. ■

Biodiversity is necessary for evolution. If too many biological functions were to disappear within a short time, it would take thousands of years before some of them reappeared.

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DANISH DONATION

Denmark has agreed to provide UNESCO with $21 million over the next four years, i.e. an average of $5.25 million a year. The funds will be allocated to activities that are in line with Denmark's development policies in the fields of education, the environment, human rights and communication. ■

SCIENCE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

An impressive battery of new technologies for examining and preserving the world's cultural heritage were reviewed at a recent symposium held at UNESCO's Paris Headquarters. The techniques included ground-penetrating radar, three-dimensional computer-generated models (virtual reality), electromagnetism, thermography, remote sensing and the reinforcement of ancient stone with injections of electrically charged crystals. ■

PEACE AWARD FOR UNHCR

The 1995 Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize was presented to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its High Commissioner, Ms Sadako Ogata, at a ceremony held at Headquarters on 5 June 1996. ■

FASHION WITHOUT FRONTIERS

To mark the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, UNESCO and the Japanese group Felissimo launched "Design 21", a project to establish intercultural links through fashion design and to encourage co-operation between young designers and textile manufacturers. In March 1996, 50 designers from 28 countries, winners of a qualifying competition, presented their creations at a fashion show held in Paris as part of the project. They are being exhibited in Tokyo in October and November 1996, and in Kobe in December.

For further information contact: UNESCO, Division of the Arts and Cultural Life, 1, rue Miollis, 75732 Paris Cedex 15, France. Tel: (33-1) 45 68 43 26; Fax: (33-1) 42 73 04 01. ■

THE 1996 IMC/UNESCO MUSIC PRIZE

The 1996 International Music Council/UNESCO Prize has been awarded to Hungarian composer György Legeti and Argentine singer Mercedes Sosa. The prize, created in 1975, has also been awarded *honoris causa* to the Paul Sacher Foundation of Basel, which was created in Basel in 1973 to collect manuscripts and other documentation related to the most important composers of our time. ■

GLOBAL SECURITY

Over 100 specialists from 30 countries attended a symposium held at UNESCO Headquarters from 12 to 14 June on the theme "From partial insecurity to global security". Officers, diplomats and academics from 30 countries attended 4 round tables: From Crisis Management to Conflict Prevention, Social and Cultural Roots of Insecurity, Conditions for Development Security, and Defence and Security Policies for Peace. The participants concluded their discussions with a proposal to create an international association of defence and strategic studies institutes to foster dialogue on ways to prevent conflicts and build and maintain peace. ■

WORLD REPORT LISTS PRESS FREEDOM VIOLATIONS

The 7th Annual Report on Press Freedom worldwide*, published by the French non-governmental organization Reporters Sans Frontières (478 pages, 90 francs) records violations of the right to inform and be informed in 149 countries. 51 journalists were killed in 1995 (three-quarters of them in Africa, especially Algeria) and nearly 400 imprisoned for doing their job or expressing opinions counter to those held by their countries' rulers. The report notes two new forms of repression: the subordination of justice to political interests and the implementation of legislative reforms that limit freedom of the press in several countries of eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East. In Western nations such as France, Germany and Austria, violence by extreme right-wing groups and extremist nationalist movements is imposing a heavy burden on the work of the press. ■

***Rapport annuel sur la liberté de la presse dans le* monde.**
For further information contact: Reporters Sans Frontières,
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RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ TUM, UNESCO GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

On 21 June Rigoberta Menchú Tum (Nobel Laureate for Peace, 1992) was named a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for a Culture of Peace by the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Federico Mayor. During a ceremony held at Headquarters, Rigoberta Menchú Tum called on all nations to provide financial support for the rapid transformations experienced by indigenous societies. ■

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This issue comprises 52 pages and a 4-page insert between pages 2-3 and 50-51.

The darkness and light

Is the state of exile, which was for so long the exception, now becoming the rule?

To be expelled from a community in the far-off times when communities regulated every detail of their members' lives was tantamount to receiving a death sentence. Not only did exiles face the future alone, bereft of the protection of the group, they also forfeited all contact with their ancestors and with their gods, as well as the possibility of setting up hearth and home. An individual banished from a community was a lost soul.

For communities themselves, exile was a collective disaster when, after being defeated in an unequal struggle, their survivors were reduced to slavery. The victors severed the ties of continuity that bound the defeated peoples to their past, keeping them alive for callous exploitation as beasts of burden with no identity as human beings.

It is true that there were more tolerable forms of exile. Exceptional people—princes, doctors, engineers or artists—who were constrained to leave their homeland, usually for political reasons, might sometimes live comfortable lives and even enjoy privileges and positions of influence in prosperous states. But they never ceased to be foreigners. An essential part of them remained anchored in a homeland that became mythologized by time, nostalgia and regret.

With the colonial conquests of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the notion of exile changed. The great voyages of discovery, advances in navigational instruments and techniques, and the growth of a permanent network of exchange across the oceans paved the way for a global market. In the course of time, large numbers of people emigrated in search of regions more politically clement or more economically promising. For these migrants uprooting was not

# of exile

by Bahgat Elnadi and Adel Rifaat

a punishment or a calamity. It might be an adventure, at one with the spirit of change that was the hallmark of the new era. They were embarking on another life, but one whose hazardous nature they freely accepted. They saw the country of their birth as a distant, stable landmark in a shifting world, a haven of certainty amidst the vicissitudes of life.

Until the second half of this century, however, exiles everywhere belonged to a very small minority. Demographic stability was the rule; population movements were the exception. Today things have changed. The international market, which formerly encompassed national markets whilst respecting their frontiers, is now in the process of abolishing those frontiers. The major economic, financial, technological and information flows criss-cross the planet.

A demarcation line now runs through all countries, dividing those who participate in the age of globalization from those who cannot adjust to it and seek imaginary escape-routes from it by withdrawing into hermetic nationalist, denominational or tribal worlds of their own. Not that all those affected by the high tide of economic globalization are privileged. Far from it. A minority holding the levers of economic power and the cultural values that open the doors to success are obtaining unprecedented power, freedom and outlets for expression. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of men and women are gradually being driven from the rural areas, regions and countries where they were born—as a result of economic impoverishment, political terror or war—and involuntarily thrust into nearby or distant centres of growth.

Their tragedy is that, although they have no future in their own land, they have little chance of prospering elsewhere. If the winners of globalization feel at home wherever they are, the losers feel excluded both from a homeland where they would have preferred to stay or to which they dream of returning one day, and from the countries to which they have emigrated, where they are generally looked down upon and do not "fit in". For the happy few, exile is freely chosen and creative; for the vast majority it is enforced and alienating.

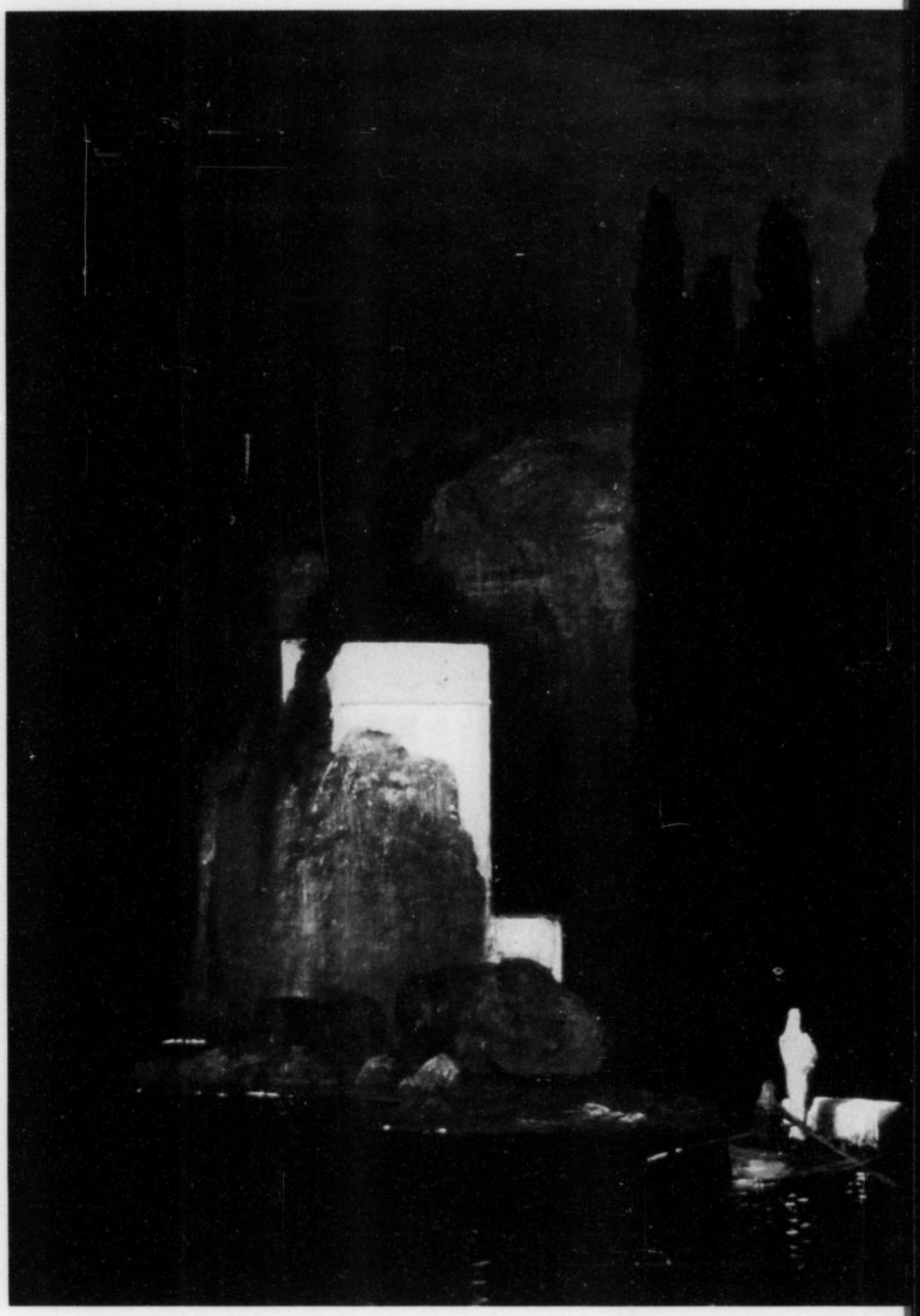
This gap is even more intolerable because while it is widening the world looks on through the universal eye of television. It is a potential time-bomb. The frustrations it causes and the tensions and violence it provokes are bound to get worse if nothing is done to counterbalance the chaotic, inegalitarian tendencies of the market.

For the time being, however, the privileged inhabitants of the planet are more inclined to defend their vested interests than to share the fruits of their prosperity. They cordon off their territory with illusory barricades and in so doing respond to the outsiders knocking on their door with some of the most retrograde arguments of the fundamentalist canon.

They forget that their own power is indissociable from the globalizing process that manufactures these outsiders. Above all, they forget that the revolutionary ideas of liberty, equality, law, justice and solidarity have played just as powerful a role in the drive to world unification as market forces. It is these ideas which sustain human creativity, advances in science and productivity, and the security of intellectual and material exchange. They have long been the prerogative of a small group of nations. They can no longer remain so. In today's open world, if their benefits do not go to all, they will be lost for everyone. ■

A LAND OF NO RETURN

Exiles live in limbo between two worlds



The Isle of the Dead (1880) by the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin.

Exile is a time when people experience, often painfully, an almost carnal attachment to the territory (country, native soil, homeland) and group (family, relatives, community, nation) they come from. That area, which has fashioned each and every one of us, and which we have ourselves fashioned for our own purposes, is also an area of nostalgia, of homesickness. Homesickness is a word which contains both the cause and the cure. Nostalgia, feeding as it does on the illusion that the cure (going home) will cure the sickness by removing its cause (exile), triggers off an emotionally charged process of memorization, reminiscence and imagination. It has the effect of sanctifying the places on which it focuses and thus puts time and place on the same plane, suggesting that the abolition of one will result in the abolition of the other.

But exile does not always take the same form. Sometimes it is long, and sometimes not so long; sometimes it is permanent, and sometimes temporary. In some cases there is no choice (as when a person is banished, deported or forced to flee); in others, exile is intentional—at least apparently so. Sometimes the outcome depends solely on the person concerned; sometimes it hinges on the goodwill of a third party. Nor does nostalgia always take the same form. A political exile's nostalgia is different from an immigrant's, an émigré worker's different from a colonizer's. It varies depending on the relationship exiles have with their native country and with their adopted country.

That dual relationship varies with time, which itself influences the perception exiles have of where they belong. Awareness of links and differences such as place and milieu, past and present, and the "here" and the "elsewhere" modulates nostalgic anxiety and melancholy.

Here, there and nowhere

In the last analysis, nostalgia expresses the essence of exile: an impossible quest to be here and there at the same time and all the time. It is fuelled by the duality of two simultaneous lives experienced on two dif-

BY ABDELMALEK SAYAD

© Kunstmuseum, Basel

ferent planes, those of reality and desire—the reality of an active life, lived in the present, pregnant with materiality, immediacy and everydayness, and the desire that is inherent in a secret and wholly internal life consisting of memories and imaginings of something which is no more, but which may yet come into being again, a life superimposed on one's actual life.

Even if the "elsewhere" of nostalgia is constantly being modified and embellished by exile, it nonetheless remains something which has already been experienced. It is familiar and "native". In this respect,

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Odysseus may be regarded as the prototype of the exile wandering in search of his or her country, and *The Odyssey* as the account of that exile and the homecoming, in other words the cure for nostalgia. It seems as if his return to Ithaca totally compensates for his departure ten years earlier. But that kind of homecoming and the ending of nostalgia that it implies are not as easy or as automatic as one might think.

A bittersweet homecoming

Odysseus does not sail the seas because he likes sailing, or because he responds to the call of the deep or the attractions of wide open skies. Homer's hero, unlike Dante's, who passes through the Columns of Hercules to venture out on to the ocean in search of new horizons, could be any émigré who simply yearns to return home after suffering the ordeal of absence—a notion later expressed more prosaically by another well-known exile, Victor Hugo: "One cannot live without bread; but one cannot live without a homeland either." There is a difference though: throughout his wanderings, Odysseus constantly prepares the way for his homecoming and embarks on a series of ordeals, each of which, as it is overcome, brings him a little closer to his final goal. What is more, he is determined to return home as master in his own house, so he can restore things to their former state, as though his ten years' absence did not matter.

Odysseus's homecoming causes none of the disappointment which almost always ▸

▸ replaces nostalgia when the long-awaited remedy proves incapable of curing the sickness. When people return home they are never the same as they were when they started out; they never return to the place they think they have left. The homecoming, for exiles, is a return to themselves, to the time preceding their departure. It is at once a retrospective and a time of retrospection. A return is possible in space but not in time. It gives rise to all sorts of hopes, but it is a source of disappointment and frustration.

Disappointment, which is something Homer's Odysseus does not experience, dogs his modern successors, such as the central character of Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Odyssey, a Modern Sequel,* a book which begins where Homer's epic leaves off. As soon as Odysseus has comfortably settled in his palace, he is racked by anxiety. He begins to get bored and dreams of setting off again. He thinks back to the fabulous lands he glimpsed and spurned. Departure and return continually echo each other. There is the pleasure of having come home. But there is above all the pleasure of constant homecoming, which requires one to be always going away. If nostalgia is not to turn into disappointment, homecoming has to be kept in abeyance. ■

A far nomads on the shores of the Red Sea.

© Patrick Lages, Paris

An ordeal transmuted into poetry

C. Pavard © Hoa Qui, Paris

Port Louis, capital of Mauritius, in 1870

THE COOLIES' ODYSSEY

BY KHALEEL TORABULLY

C. Pavard © Hoa Qui, Paris

A Tamil "signature" on the front of Mauritian business premises built in 1895.

Large numbers of men and women left India during the nineteenth century to work as coolies in countries where the practice of slavery had recently been officially abolished. Out of their exile grew a pattern of life and poetics which might be called "coolitude".

It is impossible to understand the essence of "coolitude" without charting the coolies' voyage across the seas. That decisive experience, that coolie odyssey, left an indelible stamp on the imaginary landscape of coolitude.

As the time to sail drew near, a first taboo needed to be broken. Hindus who cross the ocean, which is peopled with *hooghlis* (monsters), cut themselves off from the sacred waters of the River Ganges. They are doomed to wander eternally and lose any chance of reincarnation. It seems that the British placed huge cauldrons of water from the Ganges on board ship so that emigrants could perform their ritual ablutions. The subterfuge apparently induced the most reluctant voyagers to entrust their souls to the world beyond the seas.

It was the first time most coolies had ever seen the sea, the first time they found themselves on the verge of the unknown, wrenched away from their traditional view of the world. An age-old social taboo was also broken when Indians of every caste were packed into the steerage, which was open to the skies. They were equal before life and death on the ocean even though the voyage would only last ten days—or so they had been promised. Ten days soon go by. And yet as the ship cast off its moorings they all knew deep down that to leave your native land is a form of death.

An angry silence

There is a parallel between the coolies' predicament and that agonizing moment when slave ships weighed anchor off the African coast, with their cargo of chained slaves in their holds. That instant was marked by what the West Indian writer Edouard Glissant has called "the scream from the hold", a primal utterance from deep in the slaves' flesh, which would erupt beyond time and space, demanding an explanation from History and *reconstructing* their History.

Slaves often spent the crossing stretched out in chains. Coolies enjoyed relative freedom of movement: they could see the coastline disappearing into the distance and watch the stars, phosphorescent trails, an approaching cyclone—in other words they witnessed a slow evaporation of their earlier ▶

AN INHUMAN SYSTEM

The abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1834 and in the French colonies in 1849 led to a labour shortage on the colonial plantations. To compensate for this, Western traders took foreign contract workers. India's economic difficulties at the time encouraged a massive outflow of mainly unskilled emigrants.

Coolies (the word comes from the Hindi *Kuli*, an aboriginal tribal name, or from Tamil *kuli*, "wages") voluntarily signed contracts whose terms were very harsh, but they were often duped or press-ganged into signing. While awaiting shipment they were cooped up in insalubrious depots, then packed on to boats in inhuman conditions. Many of them did not survive the journey.

The exodus resulted in sometimes large Indian communities becoming established in certain colonies. These included Mauritius, Reunion Island and Madagascar in the southern Indian Ocean, the Fiji islands in the Pacific, Malaysia, Burma and Ceylon in southeast and southern Asia, Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, Zanzibar and Natal in Africa, Trinidad and Jamaica in the West Indies, and British Guiana and Surinam in South America.

Indian workers thus played a key role in the expansion of colonial economies. But in many countries, particularly in Africa, they were denied basic civil rights and suffered from racial discrimination, which Gandhi denounced many times during his years in South Africa, putting into practice his principle of *satyâgraha*, or non-violent action, for the first time there in 1906. ❐

C. Pavard © Hoa Qui, Paris

A young coolie woman who arrived in Mauritius in 1874.

▸ being. The coolie's carefully pondered, voluntary voyage was already a form of intermixing, physical contact with a different poetics, a different world-view. Coolies "knew" where they were going. They would think about their separation, devise a strategy for survival and settling down, and work out their place in the new existential structure that would take them in.

The Bhagavad Gita written from memory

The children of "coolitude" shared with the children of "creolity" the "scream from the hold", the moment of silence that replaces the scream at being wrenched away and then, as in the early days of the slave trade, develops into amnesia, whether intentional or not. In any history, the unsaid is often blotted out or pushed into the background, as though the best way of censoring a painful past were to surround it with dense silence. This is where the coolie *non-text*, or pre-text, comes in: it is, in a sense, a statement that is repressed ahead of exile.

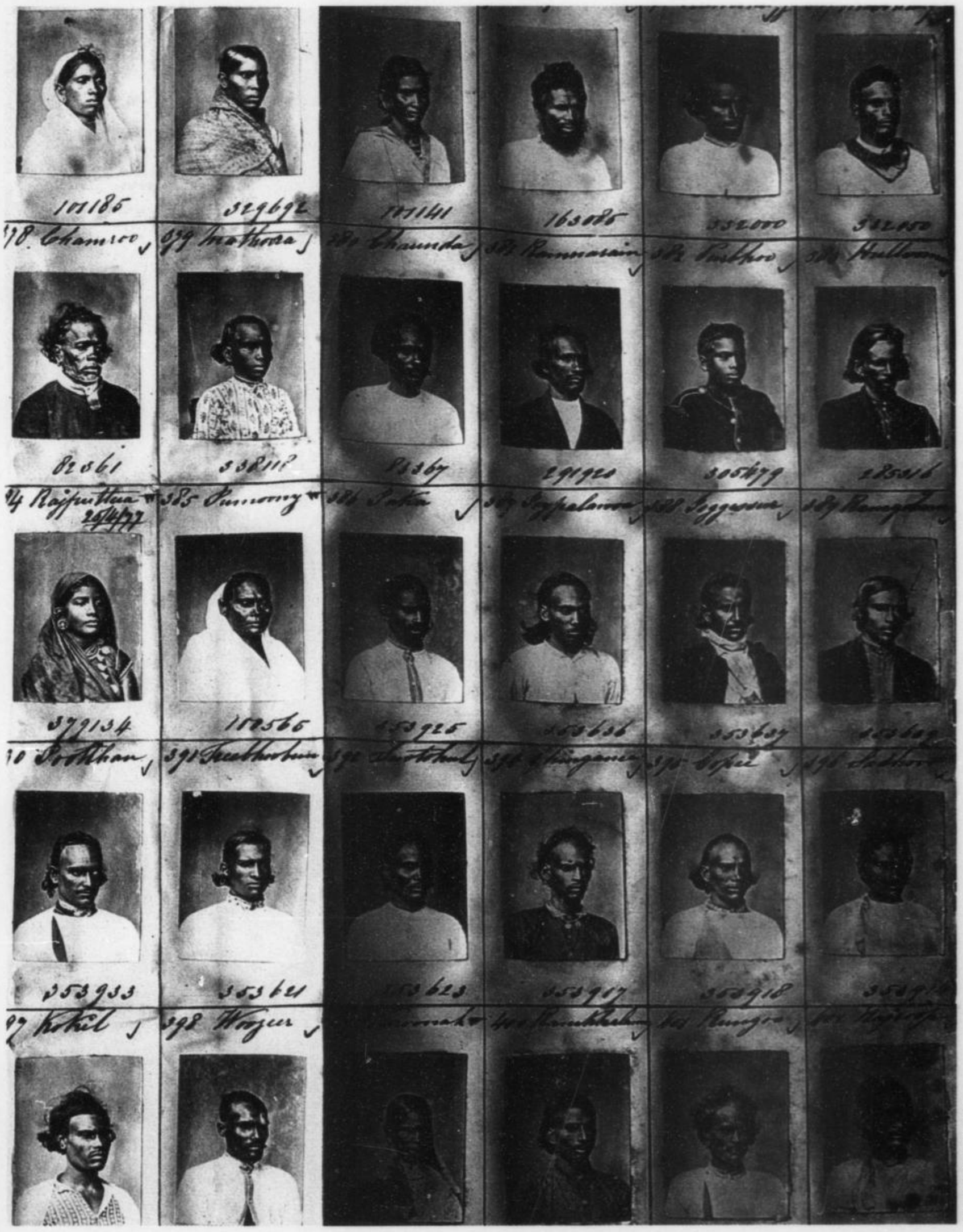
Slaves experienced that moment knowing

full well that they would have no chance of advancement in a society that had just reduced them to the state of objects. They clung to their beliefs and their languages. They also thought of suicide. Coolies, on the other hand, experienced their uprooting in real time, without bearings between heaven and earth. They came up against a culture of sailors and a language they did not speak well (except for a few educated Brahmins). Their voyage had begun with a piece of trickery: the crossing actually took almost a month. They had plenty of time to think about their fate and to understand that the deceit had already begun with their contracts. It was there, in a legal framework, that they would concentrate their efforts to become emancipated.

Coolies had a culture of the written word, and they set off on their voyage with *books:* the Qur'an, the Bhagavad Gita and the Ramayana. These sacred texts were part and parcel of their journey. The Coolie Museum in Moka, Mauritius, possesses a copy of the Bhagavad Gita which coolies wrote out from memory so as to bring a token of their original culture to the country where they had been contracted to work. This is indisputable evidence that a struggle against deculturation took place. Coolies clung to their founding texts.

The "strategies of deviation" described by the West Indian writers Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant[1] were more in evidence among African slaves, who were imbued with a civilization based on oral expression. This partly explains the greater linguistic inventiveness shown by the descen- ▸

Identity cards of Indian coolies hired to work on the plantations of Mauritius.



C. Pavard © Hoa Qui, Paris

KHALEEL TORABULLY
is a Mauritian poet.

THE CONCEPT OF 'COOLITUDE'

The first pages of the history of "coolitude" were written as soon as India was left behind in the spray of the Indian Ocean. The concept of "coolitude" is based on two pillars. Firstly, the reconstitution of a memory, which veers between an imagination drawn back to the atavistic homeland—Indianness as a set of inalienable values bequeathed by India since the beginning of time—and the constellation of signs spawned by the uneasy interaction of the exiled Indian's values with the cultures of the host country. Secondly, the contribution of a poetics based on the Indian element and shaped by the fact that the coolie was chronologically the last arrival to contribute to the making of diversified societies. ❐ K. T.

▸ dants of slaves, whereas coolies were happy for most of the time to *transfer* or extend their texts into a universe other than their own, Creoles felt they had to invent a cosmogony and a poetics. Coolies effected a transfer of their own universe to their host country: they rewrote and transposed their semiological referents to their new country. Thus, anchored to their founding texts, coolies promised themselves that if they reached the Promised Land alive they would repay their fare and own land in their turn.

A symbolic wound

The Indian worker's pragmatic view of things had a decisive bearing on literary creation and on writing, which coolies abandoned in favour of the Maati, or the earth-mother, a guarantee of their continuity and a veritable "matrix text". Their work in exile then took on a cosmogonic value. And it is here that one can sense that strong and sensual impregnation of language, that poetics of the diverse in which creolity and "coolitude" come together.

As soon as the coolies disembarked, their traumatic voyage at an end, their captain tore out, usually in great haste, the pages of the register bearing the names of the new arrivals. The pages were held in place by indented metal clips, hence the term "indentured labourers", from the root *dens* (tooth), which was often applied to coolies.

These striated pages were symbolic of the wound inflicted on Indian patronymics, which were violated by being Latinized, forms which are still used for islanders of non-European origin. This is the most significant metaphor of "coolitude"—for it sets the seal on the wound to identity and language—and is the visual mark of the coolie's place in the language. Coolies always felt out of place and were afraid of making mistakes in their master's language, and even in creole, the language of the emancipated.

Coolie authors often wrote in their ancestral languages, such as Hindi, Tamil and Urdu. But they allowed a large number of outside influences to enter their language. The mosaic thus created is a trace writ large of the exile shared by the children of "coolitude" and creolity. ■

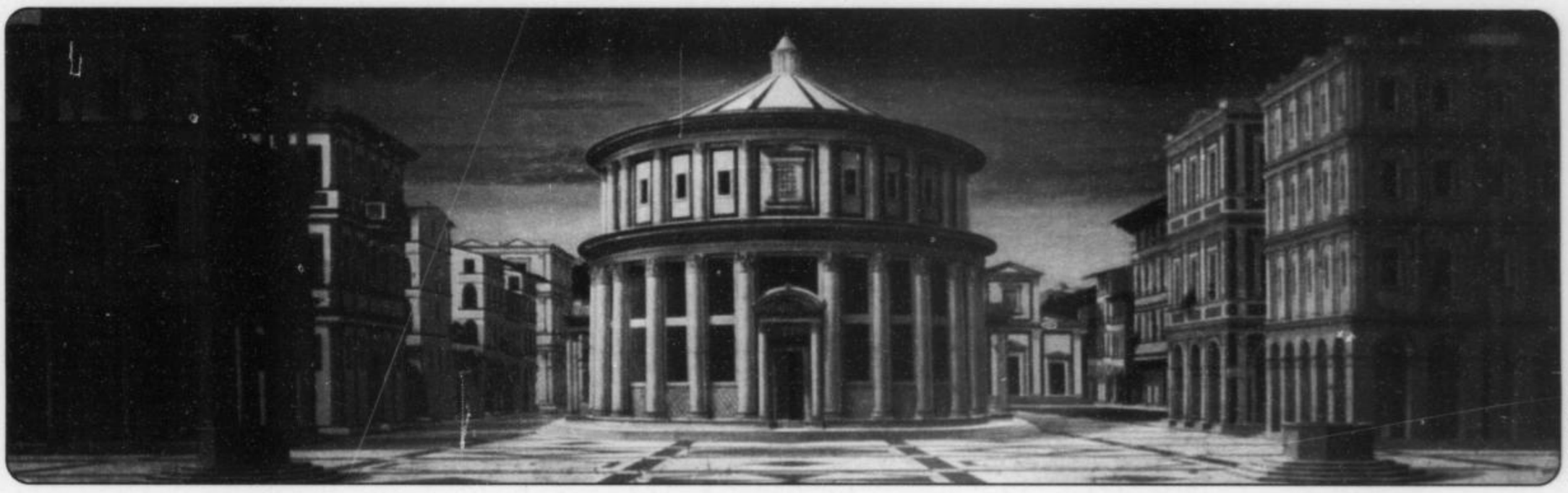
1. Authors of *Eloge de la créolité*, Gallimard publishers, Paris, 1993.

Coolies took with them the classic texts of their culture. Below, the feast of Shiva at Grand-Bassin in the south-central region of Mauritius.

C. Vaisse © Hoa Qui, Paris

A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

BY BUJOR NEDELCOVICI



© G. Dagli Orti, Paris

The intellectual history of the twentieth century has been marked by the odyssey of exiled artists, scientists and philosophers

The Ideal City **(15th century), a painting attributed to Luciano Laurana and Francesco di Giorgio Martini. It is now in the Ducal Palace, Urbino (Italy).**

An initiatory rite above all else, but also a journey into the labyrinth and a descent into hell, exile is a source of inspiration and a revealer of personality. For people who live in exile—whether voluntarily or involuntarily—their old life ends, a new one begins. Whether their exile is internal, external, political, economic or cultural, it produces a fundamental spiritual and moral change in them.

Exile has always existed. From the forced march of the Hebrews described in the Bible to Dante's banishment, it has been a regular feature of Western history and imagination. But never have exile and exodus been more systematic and widespread than in the twentieth century.

In the 1930s, many intellectuals were forced to flee Nazi Germany and the occupied countries in order to escape the jackboot. Sigmund Freud, Karl Popper and Elias Canetti left Vienna for London. Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Mann took refuge in the United States. Stefan Zweig went to Brazil, where he committed suicide. But being an expatriate (from the Latin *expatriare*, "to leave one's native country") is not easy, and all exiles are foreigners obsessed with retaining their human dignity.

But it was the Soviet Union which, more even than Nazi Germany, became the twentieth century's biggest generator of exile. Vast numbers of people left that land of banishment in search of freedom of conscience, thought and expression. The indifference and cynicism of the contemporary world were finally swept away by the publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*. The banished Solzhenitsyn is one of this century's great men of conscience. Recent events in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda (to mention only two examples) have shown that history repeats itself, but above all that human beings continue to exile each other, successively taking on the roles of banisher and banished, torturer and victim.

Voluntary exiles, whether they be intellectuals, thinkers or writers, adjust to their condition. They adopt new countries and sometimes even new languages. People like René Descartes in Holland, Voltaire, who took refuge first in England, then near Geneva, Joseph Conrad, who adopted English culture and the English language, Lawrence Durrell in the Middle East and many other well-known and less well-known figures alternate between isolation and adoption according to a sophisticated ▶

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is a Romanian novelist, essayist and scriptwriter.

▸ and sometimes elusive process whereby the distinction between voluntary and involuntary exile is sometimes blurred, even to the point of vanishing altogether. The odyssey of people like Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, Wassily Kandinsky, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett and Mircea Eliade has marked the scientific, literary and artistic history of the twentieth century.

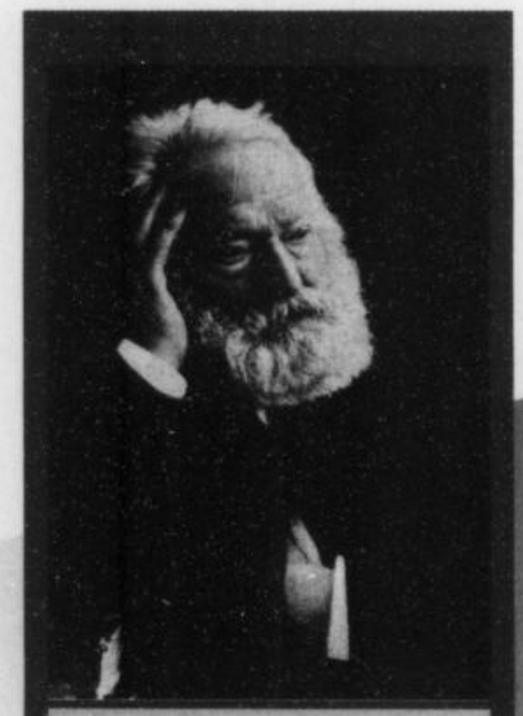
A testing time

"One inhabits not a country but a language," the Romanian essayist Emil Cioran said of writers, who form a case apart. Is not the writer always somewhere else? That conception of the homeland could explain why so few writers—Conrad, Ionesco, Cioran himself—have written in a language other than their own.

Experience has taught me that the most gruelling and frustrating form of exile is probably the exile that exists at home—the exile that precedes the physical act of departure. After I had inherited, under the iron rule of communism, the mark of dishonour branded on my father, a political prisoner, I was not allowed to occupy any social rank other than that of a manual worker on building sites. The need to understand, to explain and also to imagine made me take refuge in writing, where I won back my freedom of thought and expression. In the end, censorship forced me into physical exile, far from my family, my friends and my home. I am an expatriate in the literal sense of the term: I am neither Romanian, nor French, nor even an exile. I am a writer, and my only homeland is writing.

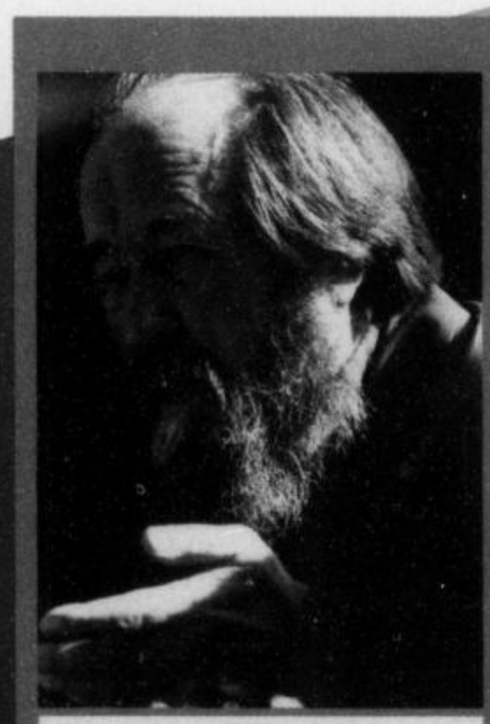
If exile is an initiation test, it is also a test of the truth. It entails shedding one's illusions and the world of wishful thinking and pretence, and arriving at a kind of lucidity. It means learning how to winnow out the wheat from the chaff by discarding bogus tolerance, which produces a semblance of inner peace, in favour of real tolerance, which requires one to immerse oneself in the universal.

In the end we have all experienced exile at one time or another in our lives. The main thing is to understand it and to try to bring out its metaphysical dimension by surpassing ourselves. Involuntary exile has become, in my case, voluntary exile in search of things past and spiritual resurrection. To accept is already to effect a return—at least to oneself. ■



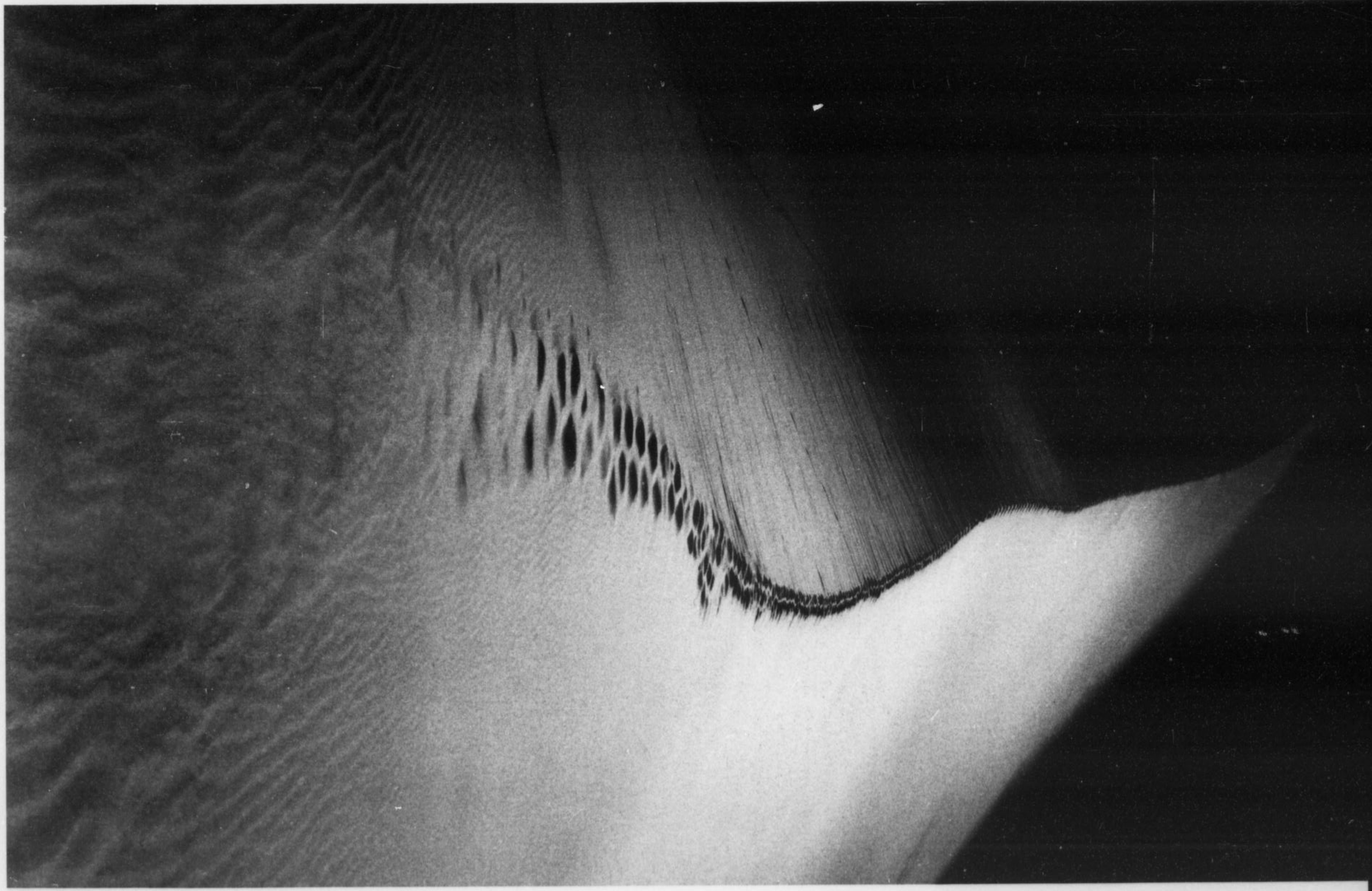
VICTOR HUGO
(1802-1885),
French writer.
Léonard de Selva © Tapabor, Paris

JORGE LUIS BORGES
(1899-1986),
Argentine writer.
Sophie Bassouls © Sygma, Paris



ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN
(born 1918),
Russian writer.
Vyto Starinskas © Sygma, Paris

WOLE SOYINKA
(born 1934),
Nigerian writer.
F. Reglain © Gamma, Paris



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TRAVELLERS FROM A FAR COUNTRY

Writers are nature's exiles

The question that writers living in a foreign country are most often asked is: "Now that you live away from your home country, do you write in the same way as you did before?" In other words: "Did you bring your source of inspiration with you, or do you need a new one?"

Ingenuous questions are often the hardest ones to answer. As if infected by their naivety, writers answer them naively.

The best answer would be another question: "In our little universe on earth, can you really be far removed from your country?"

My answer is: "No."

For a true writer, the world is immediately perceptible in its entirety, like the view that opens up when you stand at a window. This is so not only because of television, as might be expected, but for a more profound reason: the full extent of the world is always present in the consciousness of writers, whether they like it or not. If it were otherwise, their artistic vision would be mutilated, severed, and perhaps inoperative. It would be like using a language without the syntax that is vital if words are to relate properly to the expression of ideas.

© AKG photo, Paris

The rhapsode, **a Minoan bronze statuette (2600-1200 B.C.)**

In various layers of our consciousness are the Egyptian pyramids, the icecap of the North Pole, the winds of Siberia, the scorching heat of the desert, New York skyscrapers and Tibetan monasteries. It requires no effort of the imagination to conjure up these images, or others such as the crucifixion of Jesus or Genghis Khan's caravanserai. They are as familiar and natural to us as the local post office or the shop around the corner.

It could be argued that the human brain spontaneously encompasses the full extent of the world and the course of events which have fashioned it over thousands of years. From earliest childhood, people get used to this scheme of things as if to exorcise their fears and avoid distress. They often add other boundless spaces, such as the flames of hell.

Distance and exile are not just a familiar condition for the writer. To a large extent they are part of the creative mechanism itself.

They are part of the screen of mist without which it is impossible to draw the dividing line between the appearance of reality and its artistic reflection, the necessary distance between the creator and life.

Absence has always been part of the creative process.

Before writing existed, before even the concept of "the writer" existed, there were rhapsodists—travellers who came from afar bringing stories about unknown peoples in distant lands. They were also the first *authors.*

Distance stimulated their imagination and encouraged them to modify landscapes and to invent human beings different from those who had existed, or even from those who had never existed—in other words, to create characters.

In the end, distance meant that they were not subject to control and thus ensured the freedom of the creator for the first time.

It could almost be argued that it was in the nature of creators to create distance in one way or another.

A combination of political and ideological factors and writers' quarrels and conflicts with society probably influences their choice of exile. But there is also a mysterious quest

BY ISMAÏL KADARÉ

S. Bassouls © Sygma, Paris

which is closely connected with the creative process.

Yet there is not the slightest contradiction between exile and a writer's cultural identity.

On the contrary, exile can strengthen cultural identity, and at the very moment when the latter seems to be languishing it becomes even more real thanks to the universal dimension it derives from exile.

In general, writers or creators of cultural values who move to a foreign country are like the travellers of ancient times, bringing from afar the more colourful and surprising aspects of their own country. As for the foreign country that takes them in, the immobile country that takes in migrants, it is at least as interested in their fantasies as in their view of everyday life, if not more so. Thus, the mechanism works reciprocally: on either side there is a quest for distance. And on either side that quest is satisfied.

Looked at from this angle, it could be argued that writers seek exile when something goes awry in their inner creative processes. Other motives then become less important. Homer, who in all likelihood did not settle permanently anywhere, left no explanation of his movements.

Wandering seemed a natural way of life to bards and rhapsodists.

The reason why a second great writer, Aeschylus, emigrated remains obscure, or at least seems rather poorly justified in purely political terms. An inability to come to terms with Greece, or indeed with his times, or perhaps a row with the jury of a drama contest, may have strongly motivated him, but that alone cannot explain why this genius was forced to leave Athens at the age of sixty-seven.

Dante Alighieri had the bright idea of opposing the political wrangling between two hostile clans in his city—with the result that he went into a long exile (in a neighbouring city). While in exile he wrote one of the most powerful works of world literature, the *Divine Comedy*. Perhaps this was the real reason why he went into exile.

Political turmoil, especially in the twentieth century, has prompted thousands of writers and artists to leave their countries and scatter to the four corners of the globe. But even in the fever of politics there is always something that remains immobile and in abeyance, "like stars during earthquakes" (as one poet put it). And that is the fever of creation.

This fever partly explains the reasons for exile. It decides the fate of exiled creative artists. It keeps them alive or it destroys them for ever. During the communist period, and above all during the transitional phase before it was swept away, thousands of writers and artists left the East European countries, some with clearly-defined objectives, others driven by a collective psychosis, a yearning for a more interesting life. Although the dust of that storm has now settled and it is easier to see things more clearly, we are still in no position to identify the real reasons for a migration on that scale. In any case we shall need a little more time before we can appreciate the artistic treasures it made possible.

In the nineteenth century, when the Balkan states were in the iron grip of the Ottoman Empire, their ideologues, leading thinkers, poets and philosophers left the Balkans and settled in Western Europe. From there, they called on their compatriots to join them in exile. At that time, exile was an understandable consequence of repression. But as the years went by it became clear to readers of the works they wrote in exile that exile was necessary to those writers primarily so that the importance of the countries they had left behind could grow within them.

In such a situation, exile becomes sustaining and redemptive. When your country becomes impossible to contemplate, you are forced to look away. It is said that the Greek philosopher Democritus blinded himself for that reason.

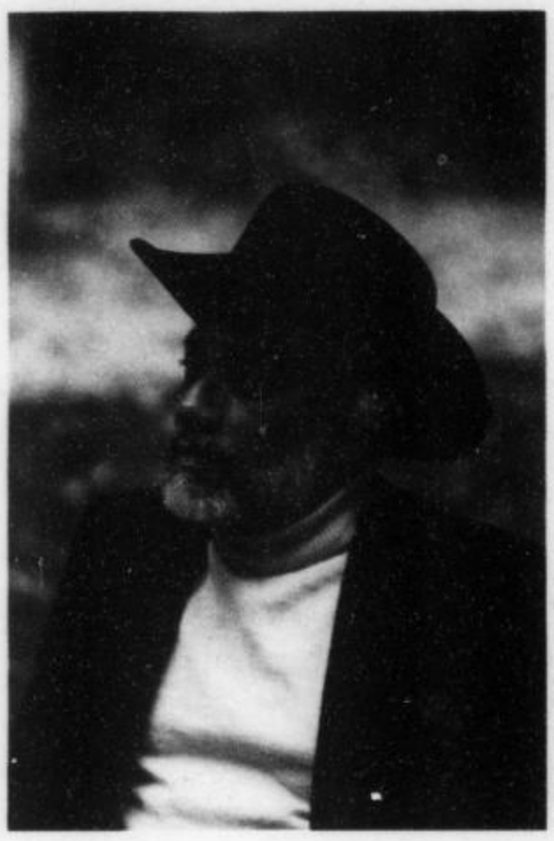
Somehow there always comes a day when, each in our own way, we replicate that age-old and definitive act. ■

ISMAÏL KADARÉ
is an Albanian writer.

THE ROOTS OF THE BANYAN TREE

BY RENÉ DEPESTRE

A wanderer who found himself at home in exile



S. Bassouls © Sygma, Paris

Does the idea of exile that our civilizations share with Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the baroque, classical and romantic eras, make any sense in the age of the Internet?

In the past, exiles were people who were wrenched from their native soil and cut off from their childhood and mother tongue, and experienced the heartache of mourning and nostalgia in a foreign land. Exile was regarded by the political authorities as a public punishment and civic death. It was a tool of the penal code which forced individuals to leave their homeland (or their adopted home) and forbade them to set foot there again. Their appetite for life and their integrity as citizens soured into an endless season of bitterness and distress as their uprooting became an incurable disease. Excluded by historical forces from the land of their birth, scarred and humiliated by the loss of their roots, exiles were non-persons whose lives were totally absorbed in the desperate quest for paradise lost.

Today we have a broader perception of the world. The alchemy of exchange and the proliferation of contacts between civilizations are accelerating as never before. The witchcraft of fundamentalist dogmas, the flotsam and jetsam of sects, mental impoverishment—the various forms of barbarity that now flourish are doomed to fail because of the cross-fertilization of values and approaches which is everywhere gaining ground in the relations between the planet's people, fields of knowledge and commercial activities.

Such a decisive change, such an enlargement of the scale of our experiences, invite us to take a fresh look at the concept of exile, together with most of the other traditional cultural landmarks that we regard as permanent fixtures. The process of globalization is bound to phase out the belief that only stay-at-homes have an identity. As people and goods move around at dizzying speed and ideas spread like wildfire from one civilization to another, the situation of the exile ceases to be cut-and-dried.

Irons in the fire

As for my own story, half a century after leaving Haïti in 1946, a lifetime's wandering has led me to find an original answer to the drama that exile can bring to a writer's life. Far from Jacmel, my native plot of West Indian soil, I have learned to stay firmly outside those closed pockets of ethnicity, those tensely inward-looking and backward-looking groups, that exiles of all kinds (and émigrés in general) tend to form in their host societies. I have always been wary of the effects of group psychology and the nostalgic prickliness that hold back migrants' natural efforts to fit into the values of their adopted homes. Thanks to my insistence on keeping two irons in the fire, the sun of home (which I have lost), and the sun of abroad (which I have gained), I have managed spontaneously to be French in Paris, Brazilian in São Paulo, Czech in Prague, Italian in Milan and Cuban in Havana. These different roots, added to my Haitian heritage, have produced the selves, vibrant with all the world's poetry, that have prepared me to experience with joy and

RENÉ DEPESTRE
is a Haitian-born poet and novelist.

wisdom the age of multiple identity and cultural ubiquity that is knocking on our door.

When I arrived in Cuba in March 1959, I had twelve years of exile in my baggage—in Paris, Prague, Milan and three Latin American capitals, Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires and São Paulo. Covered with scars, my head bursting with the contradictions of the Cold War, I loathed more than anything the dogmatism, the thought police, the wooden language and thought, the betrayals, double-think and compartmentalized morality which were the redoubtable components of Stalinism and its terrifying "socialist" realpolitik.

In the early days of my integration into the Cuban revolution, I felt strongly that Fidelism, irrigated by Che Guevarism, was capable, in spite of its youthful vagaries, of putting an end to the scandals of racism and the other social defects inherited from colonization. I lived each day under the illusion that the land of José Martí, Alejo Carpentier, Ernesto Lecuona, Nicolás Guillén, Wifredo Lam and Fernando Ortis would never bring me up against a new exile. In my heart of hearts, for years on end, in the midst of the vicissitudes of the new regime, I thought, and was told again and again by those around me, that Cuba was my home and that I was just another Cuban. . . . My Cuban years were to end in yet another departure.

Adopted homelands

What could I do with so much exile under my belt, in an *elsewhere* from Haiti which occupied in my imagination so many different adopted homelands? Could the absence of my mother tongue, Haitian creole, from my work as a writer and poet, be the sign of a linguistic exile, the root-metaphor of my nomadism as a lifelong exile? By exalting my Haitian identity through the French language and the historic values of the French-speaking community, was I not betraying Jacmel, creolity, negritude, the surrealism of the Haitians, the evenings of a childhood illuminated by a bewitched reality, by voodoo legends and spells?

These questions about my identity have been answered by the life I have lived for the last ten years as a nomad who has taken root, as a French citizen in a little town in provincial France. I know from experience that identity with a single root is an ethno-nationalist dogma which is poles apart from the robust health required by the imagination of a writer who is constantly replenished by drawing on the complementary resources of his original Haitian home and the intensely experienced home-life he has made among the French.

Once when I was in Mauritius I discovered the banyan, the sacred tree of southeast Asia whose roots sustain a single trunk from whose branches aerial roots emanate, descend into the soil and rise to the surface as new trunks. My *banyan-identity* situates my life and experience as a poet at the opposite pole to exile. ■

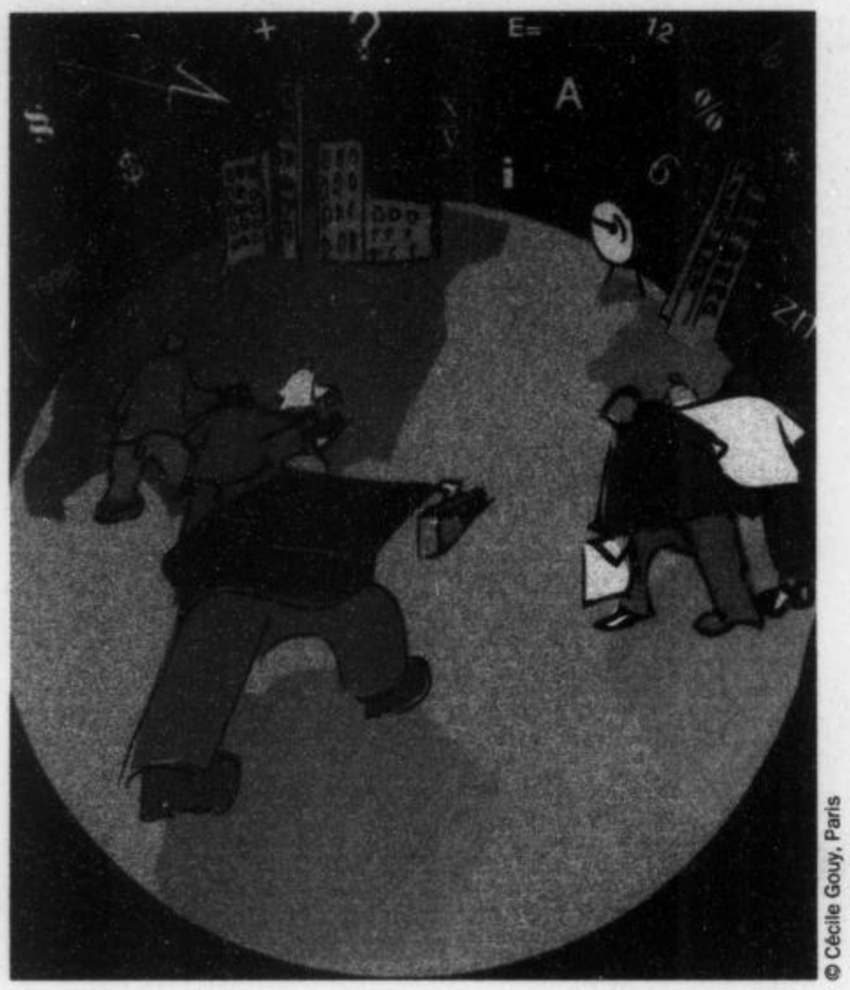
S. Cordier © Jacana, Paris

A banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*) with spectacular aerial roots.

THE BRAIN DRAIN

BY CARMEN GARCÍA GUADILLA

The North is siphoning off an alarming amount of talent from the South



© Cécile Gouy, Paris

In the second half of the twentieth century, many countries of the South began to send students to the industrialized countries for further education. They urgently needed supplies of highly trained personnel to implement a concept of development based on modernization.

But many of these students decided to stay on in the developed countries when they had finished their training. At the same time, many professionals who did return home but no longer felt at ease there also decided to go back to the countries where they had studied. This migration was encouraged by developed countries which offered attractive conditions to keep the services of those they had trained—people whose training had often been paid for by their home country.

A difficult return

In the 1960s, some Latin American countries tried to solve this problem by setting up special "return" programmes to encourage their professionals to come back home. These programmes received support from international bodies such as the International Organization for Migration, which in 1974 enabled over 1,600 qualified scientists and technicians to return to Latin America. Another example was Argentina's scheme for the repatriation of political refugees, which was supported by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In the 1980s and 1990s, "temporary return" programmes were set up in order to make the best use of trained personnel occupying strategic positions in the developed countries. This gave rise to the United Nations Development Programme's Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN), which encourages technicians and scientists to work in their own countries for short periods.

Globalization and competition

But the brain drain from these countries may well increase in response to the new laws of the international market in knowledge. The rich countries are far better placed than the developing countries to attract and/or to keep brainpower.

Recent studies forecast that the most developed countries (North America, Japan and Europe) are going to need more and more highly qualified professionals—around twice as many as their educational systems will be able to produce, or so it is thought. As a result there is an urgent need for developing countries which send students abroad to give preference to fields where they need competent people to give muscle to their own institutions, instead of encouraging the training of people who may not come back because there are no professional outlets for them.

It is essential to train people who will be able to train others in their turn, to train teachers of engineering rather than engineers and trainers of doctors rather than doctors. Here, priority must be given to doctoral and post-doctoral studies. But if all this is to lead to anything, the countries of the South must not be content with institutional structures that simply take back professionals sent abroad, they must introduce flexible administrative procedures to encourage them to return. If they do not do this, the brain drain is bound to continue.

The failure of students and trainees to return home from abroad is a complex subject. In many cases, it is independent of the wishes of those who do not return and of those in charge of the institutions concerned in their home countries. It is often the result of bureaucratic inertia and the incapacity of the country's economy to respond to the aspirations of those who have acquired high qualifications in the developed countries by offering them suitable opportunities. ■

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is a Venezuelan educator.

P. Mountzis/UNHCR

REFUGEES: THE RISING TIDE

BY RONY BRAUMAN

There have never been so many long-term refugees as there are today

Above, Somali refugees arrive in Mombasa (Kenya), 1992.

There are over sixteen million refugees in the world today. The reality behind this stark figure is the multitude of human tragedies being played out in encampments, sometimes surrounded with barbed wire, where freedom is the price paid for survival and security is maintained not by the rule of law but by enclosure. To be a refugee is to exchange one injustice for another, one form of suffering for another.

But unless we are prepared to accept the refugee's condition as a permanent one, as is sometimes unfortunately the case, it is important to understand the origins of these mass movements and the course they take. Since 1990, for example, some 10 million exiles have managed to return home and pick up the threads of a way of life they had been forced to abandon. Another important fact is that half the total number of refugees, some 8.5 million people, originate from only four countries: Palestine, Afghanistan, Rwanda, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This does not mean that the refugee problem is confined to the Third World and that the refugee's plight has never been known in the countries which are today industrialized. The Huguenots, the French Protestants who fled from France after the ▶

▸ revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the law which gave them a measure of religious liberty, in 1685 were the first group of refugees to be defined as such. To avoid *dragonnades*, the quartering of Louis XIV's soldiers in their households, forcible conversion, and exclusion from professional activities, 300,000 Protestants fled the kingdom and sought refuge in neighbouring Protestant countries. They were the first exiles for whom specific responsibility was acknowledged, in this instance a duty of religious solidarity.

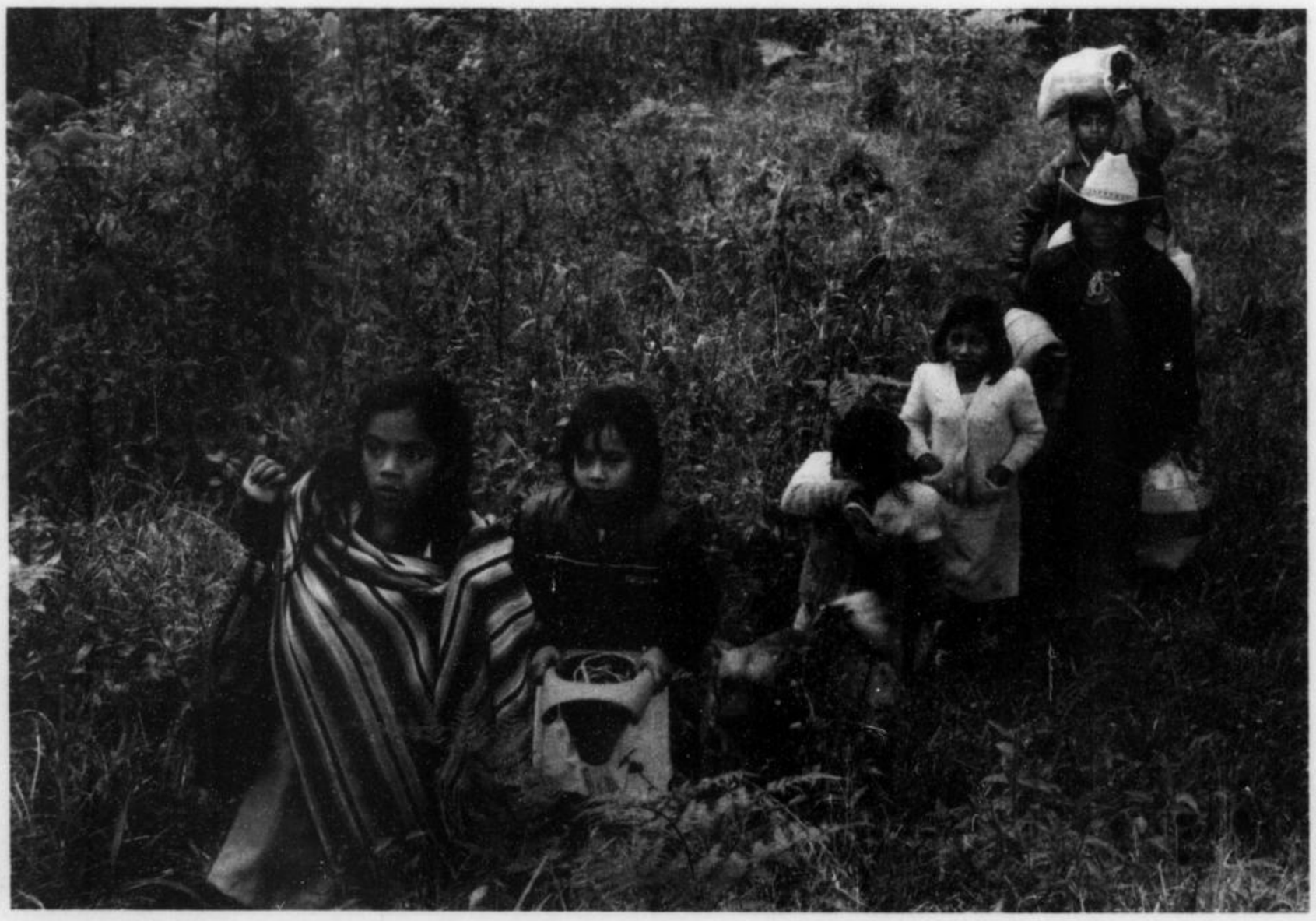
Horror and humanitarianism

But the age of refugees that has outstripped all others has been the twentieth century, which seems to have been divided between humane sensitivity and political terror. Constant growth of concern for human rights—both in the minds of men and women and in international conventions and regulations—has been accompanied by the appearance of new forms of oppression, social control and destruction. Modern tyrants are probably no worse than those of the past, but the technical means at their disposal have enabled them to envisage programmes of social surgery that their predecessors could never have imagined. Horror magnified by technology is a leitmotiv of the twentieth century, but it has been accompanied by a concomitant determination to react by taking humanitarian action. A year after it was founded in 1920, the League of Nations established the High Commission for Refugees under the leadership of Norway's Fridtjof Nansen, whose first task was to organize the repatriation of 1.5 million refugees and prisoners of war scattered all over Europe by the turmoil of the First World War.

In the Second World War, civilians were

Reza © Sygma, Paris

Rwandese mothers looking for their children. In 1995 UNICEF and the International Red Cross posted thousands of children's photographs in the refugee camps of Goma (Zaire) in the hope of reuniting parents separated from their children during the exodus from Rwanda the previous year.



Liba Taylor/UNHCR

Left, refugees voluntarily leaving Mexico to return home to Guatemala.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), established in 1949, runs 98 health units and 30 dental and special clinics. One third of the 2.39 million refugees registered with UNRWA live in crowded refugee camps. Right, a medical visit in Beqa'a camp.

in the eye of the storm. At the end of the conflict there were a recorded 21 million refugees scattered across Europe. In 1951, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began its activities (see box). According to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which was drawn up in parallel with the creation of UNHCR, refugee status is accorded to any person who, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. . . .". One necessary (but not sufficient) condition of refugee status is the crossing of an international border. This differentiates refugees from people forced out of their usual place of residence, who are considered as "displaced persons" and are without legal status.

Changing status

This definition was hammered out by Europeans in the political context of the 1950s. Since then its practical application has broadened over the years in response to changing conditions. It was a straightforward matter when a Soviet or Hungarian dissident sought protection in a democratic country in the 1960s or 1970s. It was just as straightforward when it was a question of saving

THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR)

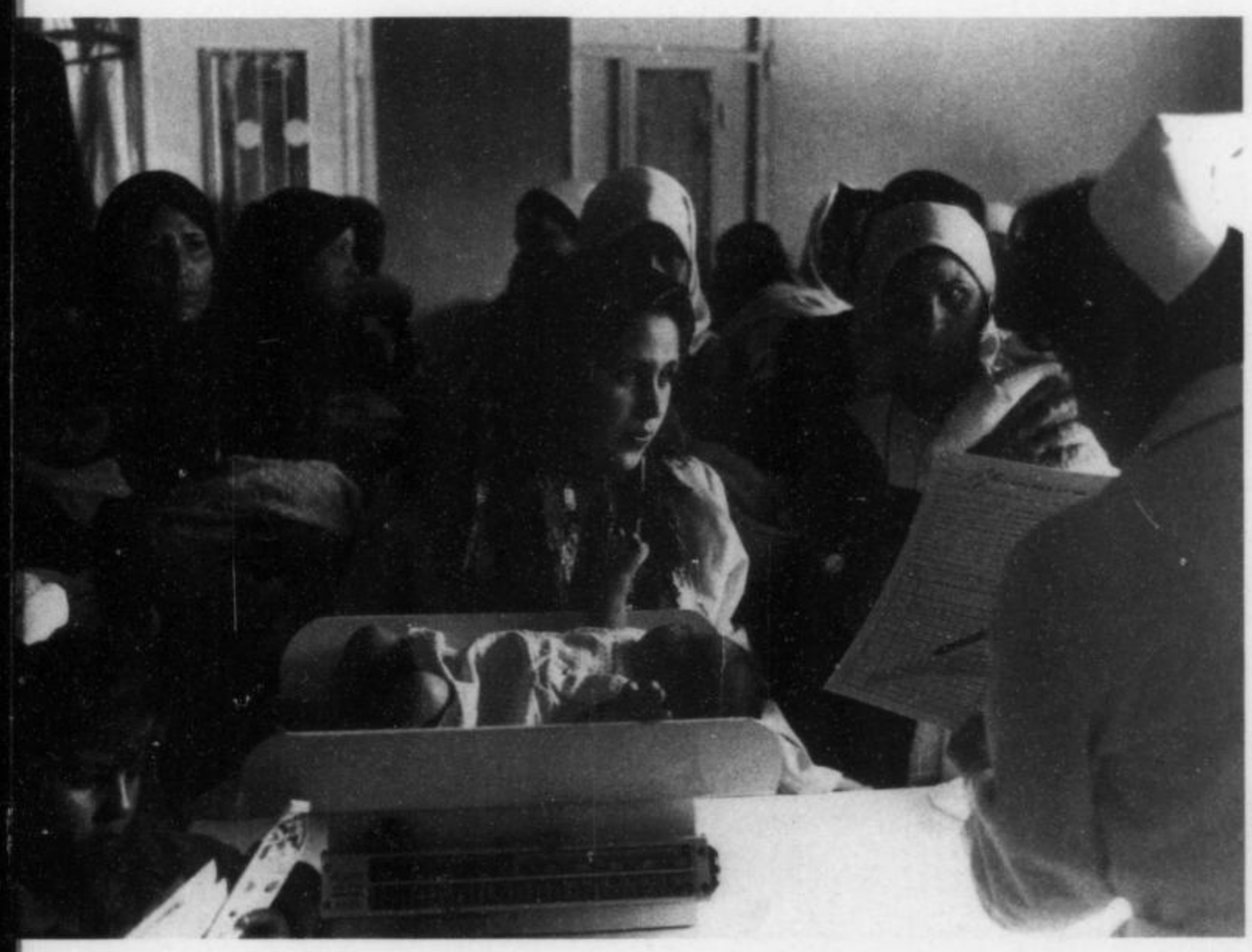
The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1951 with responsibilities for "providing international protection . . . and . . . seeking permanent solutions for the problems of refugees". Its work is humanitarian and entirely non-political. Initially, its mandate was limited to people outside their country of origin, but over the years it has increasingly been called on to protect or assist returnees in their home countries and particular groups of displaced people who have not crossed an international border but are in a refugee-like situation inside their country of origin.

The 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which is the key to UNHCR's protection activities, is a legally binding treaty. It contains a general definition of the term "refugee" that no longer ties it to specific national groups, clearly establishes the principle of *non-refoulement*, whereby no person may be returned against his or her will to a territory where he or she may be exposed to persecution, and sets standards for the treatment of refugees, including their legal status, employment and welfare.

UNHCR endeavours:

- to encourage governments to ratify international and regional conventions concerning refugees, returnees and displaced people;
- to ensure that refugees are treated in accordance with recognized international standards and receive an appropriate legal status and the same economic and social rights as nationals of the country in which they have been given asylum;
- to promote the granting of asylum to refugees, i.e. to ensure that they are admitted to safety and protected against forcible return to a country where they have reason to fear persecution or other serious harm;
- to ensure that applications for asylum are examined fairly and that asylum-seekers are protected, while their requests are being examined, against forcible return to a country where their freedom or lives would be endangered;
- to help refugees to cease being refugees either through voluntary repatriation to their countries of origin, or through the eventual acquisition of the nationality of their country of residence;
- to help reintegrate refugees returning to their home country and to monitor amnesties, guarantees or assurances on the basis of which they have returned home;
- to promote the physical security of refugees, asylum-seekers and returnees.

UNHCR's material assistance activities include emergency relief, assisting efforts to promote voluntary repatriation or resettlement within new national communities, social welfare, education and legal aid. ■



Munir Nasr/UNRWA

Iranians or Argentines from the claws of their gaolers in the 1970s. Serious complications began to appear in the second half of the 1970s when major upheavals occurred in several parts of the Third World. Changes of regime in Southeast Asia and in southern and eastern Africa, the invasion of Afghanistan and the rise of violence in Central America transformed the problem, although perceptions of it and the international instruments designed to provide a response did not really change accordingly. The end of the Cold War saw the easing of a number of conflicts, enabling millions of exiles to return home. But other regions erupted into violence.

These political transformations have had profound consequences on the status of ▶

M. Larsen/UNHCR

As persons displaced within their own national borders, these Chechen civilians fleeing the combat zone are of concern to UNHCR.

Below left, voluntary Cambodian returnees head for a reception centre set up by UNHCR.

▸ refugees. The problem was once solved by the integration of refugees in their host countries; today's solution is to provide aid in camps established along the borders of warring nations for people who hope eventually to return home. The last few years have shown that return can be possible and that exile is not inevitable.

Ethnic cleansing

A Third World phenomenon in the 1980s, refugee camps have since then reappeared in Europe for the first time for forty years. In conflicts of ethnic and political "cleansing" refugees are no longer a *consequence* of violence but its very *purpose*. Here, displacement is no longer a grim by-product of human passions but a *strategic goal* of total wars waged by armies, not against other armies, but against civilians.

Whatever the cause of the exodus may be, the international community's duty—its fundamental commitment—must be to protect these peoples, first of all by applying the principle of *non-refoulement* (see box page 27). People do not choose to uproot themselves from their land voluntarily, for reasons of opportunism. They flee to escape oppression, and the international community has a collective duty to shelter and help those deprived by force of circumstances of the means to ensure their own survival. The defence of freedom and pluralism can only be based on recognition and defence of the right of asylum. In these uncertain times, the struggle is certainly a hard one, but it is more important than ever to wage it. ■

UNHCR: FACTS AND FIGURES

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- UNHCR programmes are financed by voluntary contributions from governments and governmental and non-governmental organizations. UNHCR's budget has increased from some $550 million in 1990 to $1.3 billion in 1995. It also receives a subsidy from the regular budget of United Nations for administrative costs.
- In 1996 UNHCR employed 5,500 staff members working in 123 countries.
- In August 1996, 131 States were Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or its 1967 protocol.
- Between 1981 and 1991, the number of refugees more than doubled, rising from 8 to 17 million persons. 26 million refugees and persons of concern to UNHCR were recorded in 1996.
- In 1994, UNHCR confronted the largest and fastest exodus in its history when more than 2 million Rwandans fled to neighbouring countries between April and August.
- The conflict in the former Yugoslavia has given rise to more than 3.7 million refugees, displaced people and others of concern to UNHCR since 1991. During this period, UNHCR spent more than $1 billion in this region alone. ■

M. Kobayashi/UNHCR

RONY BRAUMAN
is a French medical doctor.

RESTRICTED ENTRY

More and more states are curbing the admission of asylum seekers

The following article has been freely adapted from a longer study prepared by Pedro Vianna.

© Photo-Calig, Freiburg/UNHCR

A camp for east European refugees in the Federal Republic of Germany (1953).

The protection of persons exposed to persecution has always been a matter of concern to human societies. The history of early Mediterranean civilizations offers several examples of writings on this subject.

At the end of the second millennium of the pre-Christian era, an Egypto-Hittite treaty set forth the conditions of safety and impunity that were to be enjoyed by persons accused of political offences who were extradited to Egypt. The Old Testament is full of references to forced exile and the protection of those fleeing persecution. Ancient Greek literature includes many texts on protection as a sacred duty and on places of asylum (from *asulos* = inviolable). But the first literary work to deal directly with the issue is Aeschylus's tragedy *The Suppliants,* in which Aeschylus establishes a link between the sacred, politics and social issues.

According to legend, an important event in the early history of Rome, where there seems to have been less emphasis on the sacred aspect of asylum, was the creation of a refuge at a place dedicated to the god Asylaeus. In his ▶

▸ *History of Rome* Livy shows how the founders of cities used the principle of asylum as an instrument of demographic policy.

In medieval Europe, asylum was essentially religious. Christian emperors like Theodosius, Valentinian and Justinian, as well as various religious councils, strove to codify the right of asylum, giving it varying degrees of generosity depending on the period and the type of offence committed. During this time, places of asylum included the university, churches, bishop's residences, convents, monasteries and, more generally, any site of a religious nature, including wayside crosses.

A sovereign act

The way states were structured in the modern era resulted in a secularization of the right of asylum, which became the sovereign's prerogative and therefore a mainly political act, even if its sacred and moral foundations persisted, and tied the hands of the state authorities.

From the end of the Middle Ages on, the practice of asylum was common in Italy. Citizens of one republic who had incurred their ruler's wrath would take refuge in the territory of another. Over a period of several centuries after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (they found asylum in the land of Islam), several attempts were made by the emerging nation-states to codify the right of asylum, notably in the Villers-Cotterêts edict of 1539, several other British, French and German legal and philosophical texts, and the French Constitution of 1793. However, these attempts were never of a universal nature, since the texts concerned did no more than deal with specific cases, e.g. the Potsdam Edict of October 1685 on the admission of French Huguenots, or else state general principles, as did Article 120 of the 1793 French Constitution (which was never promulgated).

The decision to grant or revoke asylum is regalian in character. It is the sovereign act of a state which decides to grant the citizen of another state who is already in its territory or wishes to cross the border into it the right to

Howard J. Davis © Panos Pictures, London

© Keystone, Paris

"I know for myself that exiles live on hope," (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 458 B.C.).

Opposite page, asylum seekers receive advice in the offices of a refugee aid organization at Heathrow Airport (United Kingdom).

reside in that territory. This is territorial asylum. The notion of diplomatic asylum, which fell into abeyance in Europe in the late nineteenth century, became enshrined in law in Latin America in 1889 with the signing of the Treaty of Montevideo. It is a practice which has since then been reaffirmed in numerous conventions and is still followed today.

Refugee status

In 1921, the explorer Fridtjof Nansen was appointed High Commissioner for Refugees. There followed a series of international agreements applicable to specific categories of refugees. But it was not until 1938 that the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees, set up that year, first outlined a more general definition of the refugee extending to "all persons . . . who, as a result of events in Europe, have had to leave or may have to leave their countries of residence because of the danger to their lives or liberties on account of their race, religion or political beliefs".

After the Second World War, European states had to contend with the problem of several million refugees and displaced persons. But the complexity of the way in which the various categories of refugee were listed in the constitution of the International Refugee Organization (IRO) set up in 1946 reflected differences of appreciation between the eastern bloc states and those of the West. It was not until the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (the Geneva Convention) that the issue was clarified.

The crucial importance of this Convention lies in the fact that it sets forth a universal definition of refugees that has nothing to do with the origin of the person concerned and can be applied irrespective of time and place. This definition (see article page 27) is now binding on States Parties to the Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

From theory to practice

The 1951 Geneva Convention also defines the circumstances under which refugee status no longer applies, contains clauses which exclude a refugee from its field of application, and determines the guarantees and protection that states must grant refugees they admit. However, the Convention does not oblige states to grant refugees the right of residence, i.e. territorial asylum, and leaves each country free to organize its own procedures for recognizing refugee status. Since Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution", is not binding in law, it may be safely asserted, whatever the Geneva Convention may say, that from a legal standpoint the right of asylum in fact remains the right of a state to grant asylum.

In practice, states tend systematically to grant asylum to those they recognize as enjoying refugee status. Moreover, both the Convention on the Application of the ▸

© AKG photo, Paris

In the late 17th century many French Protestants, or Huguenots, found refuge in Prussia from persecution in their own country. Above, *The welcome of the Huguenots* to the court of the Elector Frederick William. Wood engraving (circa 1890).

▶ Schengen Agreement,[1] in its section relating to asylum, and the Dublin Convention,[2] define the asylum seeker as a person who tries to enter the territory of a state with a view to seeking recognition of his or her refugee status.

We may "sum up the essential differences between the status of a person who has obtained asylum and refugee status [as defined by the Geneva Convention] by saying that the former... provides no guarantee as to procedure or continuity of residence, since it is subject [only] to the wishes of the host state, whereas the latter... provides a persecuted person with guarantees of protection, procedure and continuity of residence, as well as the minimum rights laid down in the Geneva Convention[3]".

How is it, then, that despite the existence of a universally applicable convention and a gradual convergence of opinion as to what constitutes asylum or refugee status, the main non-governmental organizations dealing with refugees increasingly accuse the developed nations of reducing to a trickle the number of cases where asylum is granted?

Increasing restrictions

In practice, recent developments have resulted in the subordination of recognition of refugee status to the granting of asylum, rather than the other way round. What has happened is that the developed states have taken draconian steps to ensure that as few asylum seekers as possible actually enter their territory. This makes it extremely difficult for such people to gain access to the procedures which determine whether or not they qualify for refugee status.

So as to be in a position to withhold refugee status from the very large numbers of asylum seekers from such countries as Algeria, Bosnia, Somalia, Chechenya, Romania and Turkey, European states have tended to read into the text of the Convention what it does not contain. They claim, for example, that persecution which is not carried out by state bodies does not come within the Geneva Convention's field of application. This means that victims of persecution occurring in the course of a civil war or widespread disturbances would not benefit from the Convention. But in fact the text of the Geneva Convention sets no conditions as to the perpetrator of persecution, and in its *Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status* the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner stipulates that persecution "may also emanate from sections of the population that do not respect the standards established by the laws of the country concerned," and cites religious intolerance as a case in point.

By way of contrast, the 1969 Convention of the Organization of African Unity covering matters specific to refugee problems in Africa and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees in Central America, Mexico and Panama are in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Geneva Convention and even spell out the definition in full.

It is well known that arbitrary practices gain ground surreptitiously and attack the weakest before taking hold of society as a whole. Countries which make themselves out to be champions of human rights should pause to think for a moment about the example they are setting when they slam the door on the persecuted, whereas the countries of the South, including the very poorest, have no option but to take in the vast majority of the millions of refugees listed by UNHCR. ■

1. The Schengen Agreement (1985) on free circulation of goods and persons within the European Economic Community, now the European Union. *Editor*
2. The Dublin Convention (1990) supplements the Schengen Agreement for matters concerning asylum seekers and refugees. *Editor*
3. "Les réfugiés dans le monde", an article by Pedro Vianna, Luc Legoux and Frédéric Tiberghien published in *Problèmes politiques et sociaux* n° 699, La Documentation française, Paris, 1993.

FACT FILE

The world's major refugee situations

UNHCR is providing protection and assistance to 26.1 million people around the world, of whom 13.2 million are refugees.

War in former Yugoslavia
Some 3.7 million people who have been displaced or affected by the war are receiving humanitarian assistance from the United Nations, 2.4 million of them in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone.

Asylum in Europe
Since the early 1980s, around five million applications for refugee status have been submitted in Western Europe. UNHCR tries to ensure that any measures taken to control this phenomenon are consistent with the principles of refugee protection.

The Palestinian question
Around 3.2 million people are registered with UNRWA, the agency responsible for Palestinian refugees. Their future remains one of the most complex issues which must be addressed in the Middle East peace process.

West African refugees
The conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone have forced almost a million people into exile in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Large numbers are also displaced within their own countries beyond the reach of international assistance.

Guatemalan repatriation
Some 20,000 Guatemalans have returned to their homeland over the past 10 years. 9,500 of the 45,000 who remained in Mexico were repatriated in 1995 with assistance from UNHCR.

Haitian asylum seekers
UNHCR is assisting with procedures designed to determine the status of asylum seekers from Haiti and to monitor the situation of those who return.

Reintegration in Mozambique
More than 1.6 million refugees returned to Mozambique from six neighbouring states between late 1992 and early 1995. They must now begin to support themselves and to reintegrate within their own communities.

Conflicts in the Caucasus
Recent years have witnessed a succession of population displacements within and between Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Russian Federation, involving around 2.5 million people. Many of this number are unable or unwilling to return to their former place of residence.

Reconstruction in Afghanistan
Half of the Afghan refugees have repatriated since 1992, leaving nearly three million in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Additional reconstruction efforts are needed within Afghanistan to enable their return.

Displaced Sri Lankans
More than 54,000 Sri Lankan refugees have returned from India since 1992, leaving nearly 90,000 in their country of asylum. UNHCR provides assistance to the returnees and to other people who are threatened or displaced by the war.

Repatriation to Myanmar
By mid-1995, only 50,000 of the 250,000 people who fled from Myanmar in 1991 and 1992 remained in Bangladesh. The homeward movement, organized by UNHCR will continue until the end of the year.

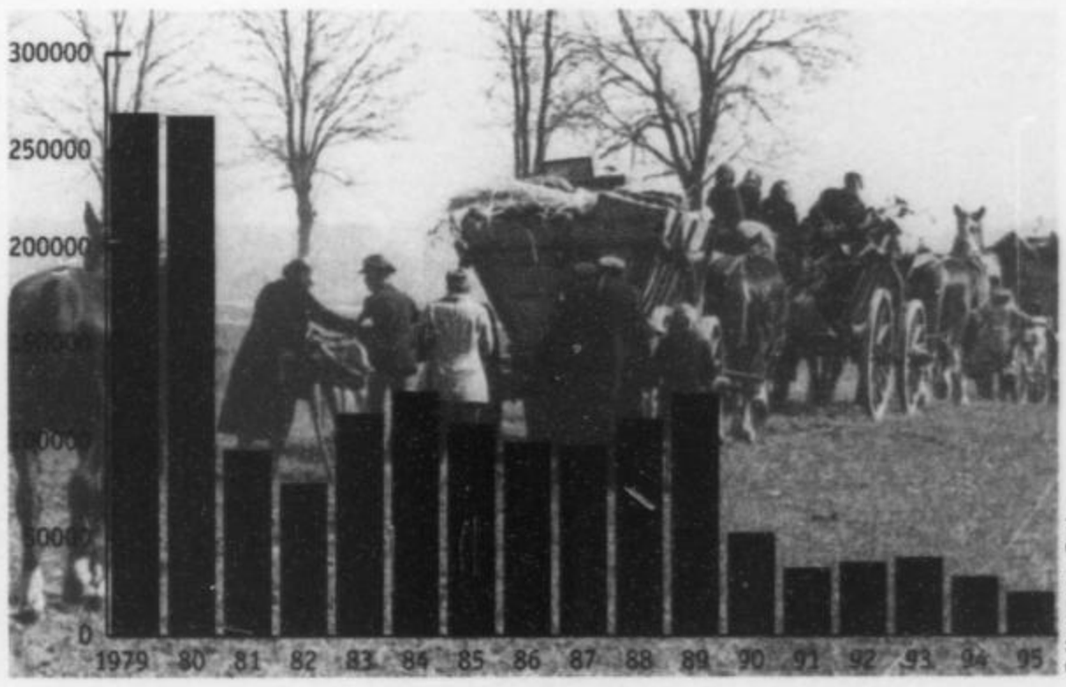
Vietnamese boat people
Although the departure of boat people has effectively come to a halt, just over 40,000 Vietnamese asylum seekers remain in camps throughout Southeast Asia. Nearly 80,000 have gone back to their own country, where their situation is monitored by UNHCR.

The Horn of Africa: exile and repatriation
UNHCR continues to assist around 1.3 million people from the Horn of Africa and the Sudan, traditionally one of the most important refugee-producing regions. The repatriation to Eritrea from Sudan is under way, more than 30 years after the first refugees left that country.

The Rwanda/Burundi emergency
More than a million Rwandese poured into Zaire between April and July 1994, one of the largest and fastest refugee movements ever seen. UNHCR is now providing protection and assistance to some 2.2 million displaced people in Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire. ■

Source: UNHCR, Geneva
Statistics date from August 1996.

The number of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, 1975-1996
Of the 26.1 million persons assisted by UNHCR in 1996, 13.2 million are refugees in the strict sense—people who have crossed an international border and been granted asylum in another state. "Other people of concern to the UNHCR" are internally displaced people (those who have fled for similar reasons to refugees but have not crossed into another country), returnees, war-affected populations and other groups benefiting from UNHCR protection and assistance activities. Totals do not include Palestinian refugees assisted by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in the Near East.
Source: UNHCR 1996.



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Refugees resettled by UNHCR in third countries, 1979-1995
The procedure of third country resettlement involves transferring refugees from their country of asylum to another state which has agreed to admit them and to grant them long-term residence rights and the opportunity to become naturalized citizens. Over the past decade, the international community has reached a broad consensus that third country resettlement is the least preferred solution to a refugee problem, "the solution of last resort".
Source: UNHCR 1996

Commentary

Federico Mayor

The struggle for peace

Unesco/Gil Jacques, Montréal

UNESCO has been in existence for fifty years, and for fifty years it has been erecting its vast programme for the promotion of peace through education, science and culture. But the work of constructing peace is unending; it has to go on in all places and at all times.

The world has changed considerably in this last half century, and especially in recent years, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the East-West standoff, the rise of conflicts of a new type within nations, the increasingly strong urge towards the assertion of selfhood, the growing scale of population movements, the swing towards democracy, the communications explosion, and so forth. The world we live in is changing and reshaping itself along lines which are as yet hard to decipher.

In this world that is struggling to be born, two certainties stand out. The first is that the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance, exclusion and violence has become an established fact and is spreading wider and wider. It is poverty that drives people from the South to seek a better life in the North and that drives rural populations to the towns; it is against a background of ignorance that fear, extremism and intolerance thrive; and it is exclusion that brings in its train despair and violence. Secondly, the disparity in the distribution of the planet's wealth has become intolerably great, with nations living at widely differing levels of development and the gulf between rich and poor within nations growing deeper. These glaring inequalities are a threat to peace throughout the world.

It is for this reason that UNESCO set up a specific programme on the culture of peace in 1994.

The concept "culture of peace" is not easy to define. The definition is being worked out one step at a time, forged in the heat of the work being done and the thought being given to the question by all who are serving the cause in the field. The first characteristic to have been identified concerns the relationship between peace, development and democracy, a relationship that is growing steadily closer and whose synergic effect is growing steadily stronger. Peace, development and democracy constitute a three-cornered system of interactions that has constantly to be created and recreated. The end of

an armed conflict, the moment when the warring parties express a willingness to come to an agreement, is often the right time for consolidating peace and trying to get it to take root in people's minds, in institutions and in patterns of behaviour. This explains why UNESCO has a special role to play in regions where this kind of post-conflict situation obtains.

In the general context of new approaches to security, UNESCO is for the first time entering into a dialogue with the military authorities of various countries. I believe that the armed forces, which occupy a central place within the nation, rank among UNESCO's natural partners, and as such have a decisive contribution to make to the task of building a culture of peace. UNESCO is accordingly involving defence colleges, centres of strategic studies and military academies in its activities. This dialogue is proving fruitful for all parties concerned. It is, furthermore, essential at a time when, against a background of increasing democratization, all the constituent parts of society are required to play their part both in the construction of peace and in devising and implementing development strategies that demand not only reductions in military budgets but a redefinition of the role of the armed forces.

UNESCO seeks to create a closer relationship with civil society and to organize all its component parts into working for peace and is particularly concerned to establish a more fruitful dialogue with parliamentarians. I firmly believe that UNESCO's exchanges with these key figures of democracy, both at the international level, through the Interparliamentary Union, and at the national level, give its work a solid basis and a pragmatic dimension with which it can no longer afford to dispense.

The national-level programmes for a culture of peace pursue the following objectives: non-violent conflict management, the establishment of democratic procedures and respect for basic individual rights; and participation by all in the process of peace and development. The following are a few examples.

UNESCO peace-building activities

Burundi. One of UNESCO's first responses to the crisis following the events of October 1993 was to organize a symposium in Burundi on the culture of peace and to set up a UNESCO Centre for the Culture of Peace, which in 1995, in co-operation with national institutions, non-governmental organizations and other agencies of the United Nations system, ran a series of seminars on training and education for peace, human rights and democracy for the benefit of journalists, primary and secondary school teachers, activity organizers, educators, provincial governors, local government officers, leaders of women's associations and deputies of the national parliament.

Mozambique. UNESCO organized training and awareness-raising activities for parliamentarians in 1995, e.g., enabling twelve members of parliament to go on a study tour in South Africa and Malawi and exchange views with parliamentarians in those countries. These measures have helped to create a climate of confidence.

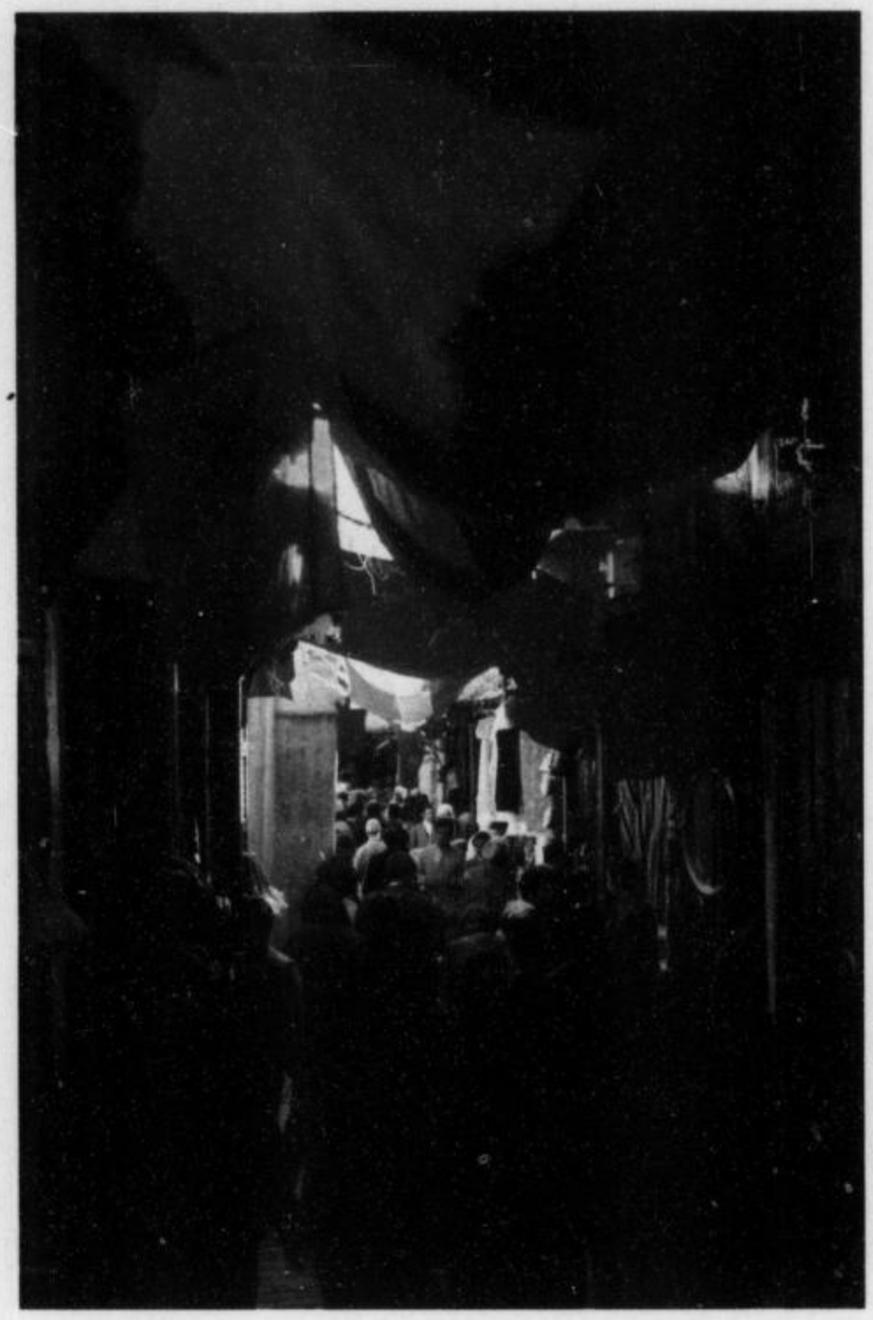
Rwanda. A nation-wide forum on the culture of peace held in Kigali in January 1996 with the participation of people representing the country's various social strata and political movements, gave an opportunity for discussing key questions relating to the re-establishment of peace following the genocide. The forum's recommendations formed the basis of projects that have been incorporated into UNESCO's current action plan for Rwanda.

Somalia. UNESCO convened a symposium of Somali intellectuals in Sana'a (Yemen) in April 1995 to map out ways of promoting the culture of peace in Somalia. A follow-up meeting was held in Paris in October 1995 to set up a group with responsibility for drawing up projects to be carried out with the support of UNESCO, the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme.

El Salvador. In October 1995, the Salvadorian Legislative Assembly held a seminar to consider the contribution it could make to the consolidation of peace and the furtherance of national development. Eighty regular members of the Assembly and more than twenty substitute members worked together on a document addressed, among others, to the Head of State, the President of the Supreme Court, government institutions, the diplomatic corps and the press. The seminar adopted a proposal for co-operation with UNESCO to encourage dialogue between different currents of opinion and make it easier for democratic rules and systems to function.

Congo. A national forum was held in December 1994, bringing together all the country's political forces with representatives of civil society. This was a fundamental step forward in the peace process. It enabled an ongoing dialogue between all the conflicting parties to be set up and resulted in the adoption of a peace charter.

All UNESCO's activities, all the projects it carries out, directly or indirectly, the studies it commissions, the meetings it convenes and the exchanges it organizes in the fields of education, science, the social sciences, culture or communication, serve a single purpose: peace. Whether it is working through its Associated Schools to familiarize children with ethnic, social and cultural diversity, enabling scientists from different parts of the world to exchange their findings, facilitating knowledge transfers by establishing professorships or granting fellowships, or whether it is identifying ways of managing social change by bringing representatives of different viewpoints face to face, encouraging the establishment of independent media or bringing young artists from many different backgrounds together, UNESCO has one overrriding concern, in full accordance with its ethical mission, and that is to allow the inhabitants of Planet Earth to get to know one another better, so that they may have a truer appreciation one of another and may therefore live together in greater harmony. ■



Bruno Barbey © Magnum, Paris

The Medina of Fez—crafting a future for the past

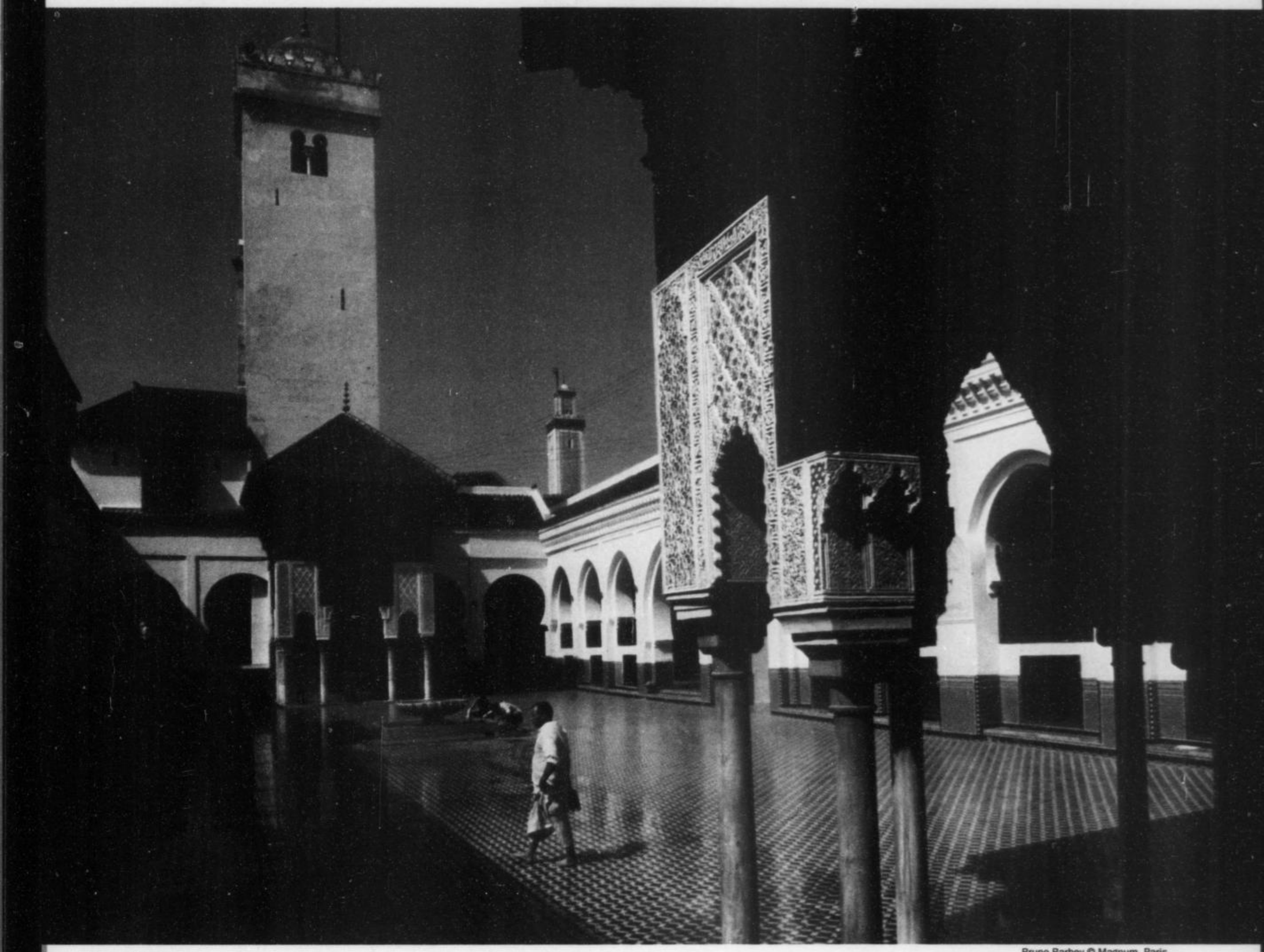
by Geneviève Darles and Nicolas Lagrange

The old city of Fez (Morocco) is one of the most beautiful quarters of its kind in the world. It was placed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1980, and a few years later Morocco and UNESCO embarked on a far-reaching safeguard operation which is now starting to bear fruit.

Viewed from the high part of the city, the medina of Fez unfolds as a dense, undulating expanse of little white houses from which a number of more imposing buildings emerge. To visit the medina is to venture into a labyrinth of alleys bustling with activity, a realm of pedestrians, donkeys, commerce and craftsmanship, whose ground-plan has not changed for centuries. The stroller on the look-out for historical remains will find many examples of fine architecture—madrasahs, mosques, fountains—amid the mass of dwellings. The hand of the past still makes an imprint on the daily life of the community.

Founded in 808 A.D. (192 of the Hegira) by Idris II, Fez grew

GENEVIÈVE DARLES AND NICOLAS LAGRANGE
are French journalists.



Bruno Barbey © Magnum, Paris

Above, the inner courtyard of the Qarawiyin mosque.

Opposite page, a souk (market) in Fez today.

up at the crossroads of communication joining the Mediterranean to black Africa and the eastern Maghreb to the Atlantic. In the ninth century the Andalusians expelled from Cordoba by the Ummayads settled on the right bank of wadi Fez, and migrants from Kairouan in Tunisia made their homes on the left bank. Fez-el-Bali came into being as a result of the union of the two communities in 1069.

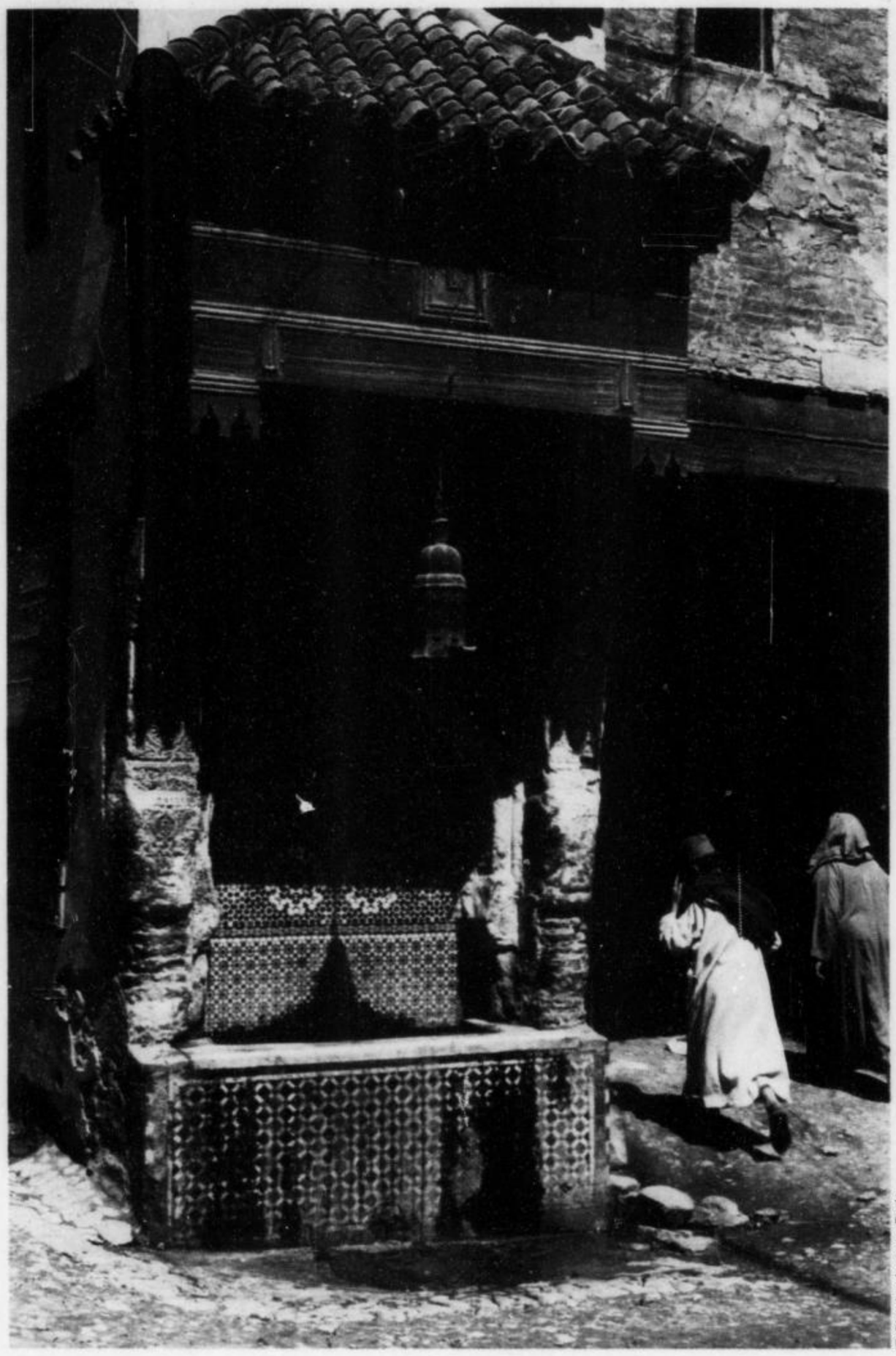
Qarawiyin university, the world's oldest, was founded in Fez in 859 by a woman, Fatima el Fihri al Kairouani. Celebrated madrasahs (Qur'anic schools) developed around it at the time of the Marinids, the Berber dynasty which established its rule over Morocco during the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries. The city's intellectual, artistic and religious influence soon reached beyond North Africa. Students came from all over the country, but also from the Orient, Africa and Spain to work under illustrious teachers. Among those who studied in Fez were the historian Ibn Khaldun, the mathematician Ibn Al-Yasamin, the physician Ibn Rushd (Averroës), and many linguists.

An ambitious scheme

A centre of Islam, the city was flourishing economically by the end of the thirteenth century. The Marinids made it their capital and ordered Fez-el-Jedid, the white city, to be built to the west of Fez-el-Bali, the historic city. In the following centuries, the new city continued to expand and welcomed an influx of new inhabitants, mainly of rural origin.

Under the French protectorate (1912-1956), the medina was neglected and priority was given to developing a modern city. In 1980 it was the home of over 60 per cent of the city's population and their economic activities. But road access was inadequate, and the district was slowly going downhill. With its 143 mosques, seven madrasahs and 64 monumental fountains, Fez was a threatened masterpiece.

Then UNESCO placed Fez on the World Heritage List. After five years' study, Morocco and UNESCO finalized plans for complete rehabilitation of the old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The Najjarin Fountain (17th century), near the Moulay Idris mosque.

city, including its monuments, dwellings, urban amenities (roads, drainage, lighting, etc.) and economic life. The project really took off in 1989. After a general feasibility study, the Moroccan state set up Ader-Fès, a body responsible for carrying out and co-ordinating the rescue programmes. Around fifty monuments—the oldest and most significant from a historical or architectural viewpoint—are involved. The estimated total cost of rehabilitation is around $600 million and the first restoration work is being done step by step, as donor commitments are received.

Ader-Fès is using the best local craftsmen, the mââlem, keepers of the city's traditional skills, to reconstitute the original architecture of the buildings using time-honoured techniques. It is also setting up a training institute in traditional building crafts and a rehabilitation and restoration laboratory. On the ground the work is proceeding slowly, however. The streets of the medina are so narrow that all the materials have to be brought in by donkeys. The general need for protracted and meticulous work is well illustrated by the case of Mesbahiya madrasah, of which only a few terraces and ceilings and a handful of decorative elements have survived. The foundations of the madrasah have now been stabilized and the next step is to reconstitute the architectural details in all their refinement.

A pragmatic approach

The cultural context also plays an important role in the success of this gigantic enterprise. "People here do not venerate art for art's sake", says Abdellatif el Hajjami, director-general of Ader-Fès. "They attach more importance to a hammam than to a monument. If restoration is to be accepted, a new social function must be found for the monuments." This approach lies behind the renovation of the Najjarin funduk (which housed a livestock market in the eighteenth century) and the nearby carpenters' souk which has been transformed into a woodwork museum and will house a library for specialists and a restoration laboratory.

Restoration of the Observatory Tower of the great Qarawiyin mosque, built in 1348 and destroyed by fire a few decades ago, is being carried out in the same spirit. When the work is finished it will house an astrolabe museum. Bou Inaniya madrasah, which was built in 1356 by the Marinid Sultan Abou Inan, is also being renovated. A building of outstanding decorative refinement, Bou Inaniya is a place of living memory (it is still a Friday mosque). It contains the world's oldest hydraulic clock.

One of the most recent safeguard operations has focused on Dar Adyel palace, built in seventeenth-eighteenth century style. This sumptuous dwelling is far more spacious than other contemporary buildings of its kind and has original architectural features. It belonged to the Governor of Fez in the seventeenth century and later became the property of leading citizens of Fez. When its structure has been consolidated, its decorative elements of carved or incised plasterwork, its woodwork and small coloured tiles known as *zel-*

lij will have to be reconstituted. When restoration is complete, Dar Adyel palace will, as in the past, be the home of a conservatory of Andalusian music.

In all, a dozen historical monuments are currently being rehabilitated, but equally critical work is also being done on housing, mains, and roads. The success of repairs to the drainage system will largely hinge on the transfer of the most polluting activities—tanneries, oilworks, copperware factories—to Ain Nokbi, a new craftsmen's district outside the medina which is equipped to handle their wastes.

Before rehabilitation work began, the medina had an overpopulation problem caused by demographic growth and an influx of population from the countryside. Deserted by the better-off, the old city was caught in a downward spiral of poverty. There were growing deficiencies in the public services. This situation has now been halted.

Emergency measures have been taken on over 200 buildings that were on the verge of collapse. Ader-Fès also intends to renovate a number of dwellings of historic value (there are over 10,000 of these in the medina out of a total 13,385 buildings) with help from the municipality and the people concerned. It has carried out a massive computerized survey in which the address, architectural type, cultural value, number of households and physical condition of each building is recorded.

The thorny problem of roads and streets remains to be solved. There was some support for a plan for a road through the medina, but the proposal had a hostile reception internationally. Today the idea is to make two or three inroads, each a few hundred metres long, so that the old city will become more accessible to emergency services and its business premises will be less isolated. Although rehabilitation operations are still far from complete, the medina has already recovered some of its unique radiance and charm. ■

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A craftsman coats a brick wall with plaster before covering it with *zellijs*, small chequerboard tiles.

The Institute for training in traditional building crafts, set up in 1992.

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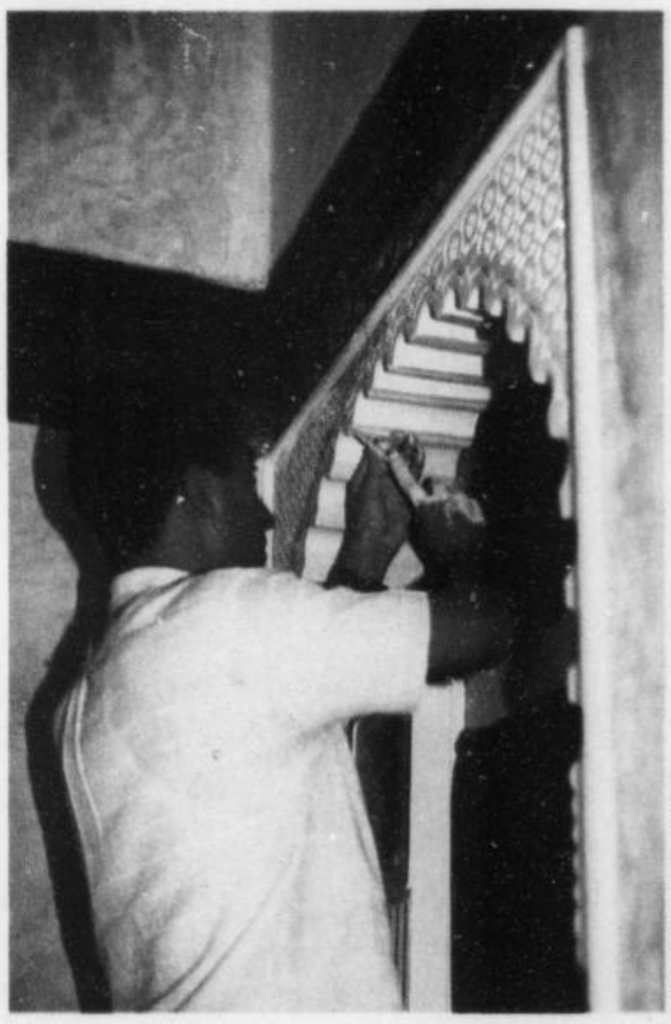
Carved plasterwork, right, is an important feature of traditional architecture in Fez.



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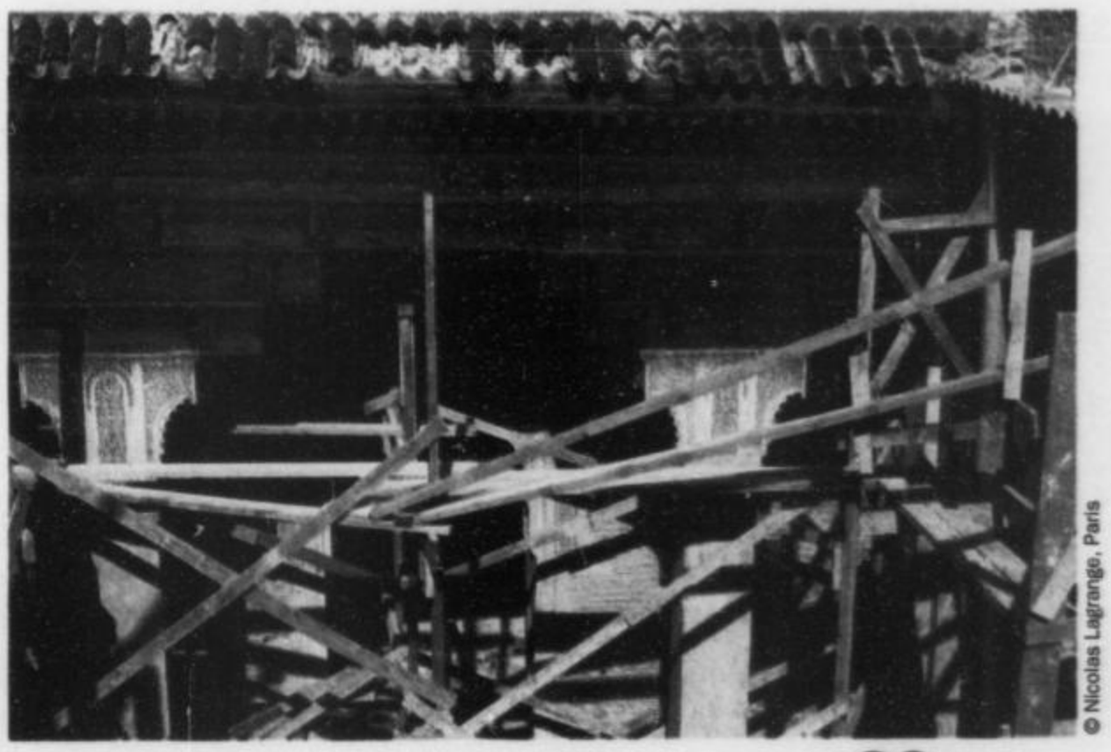

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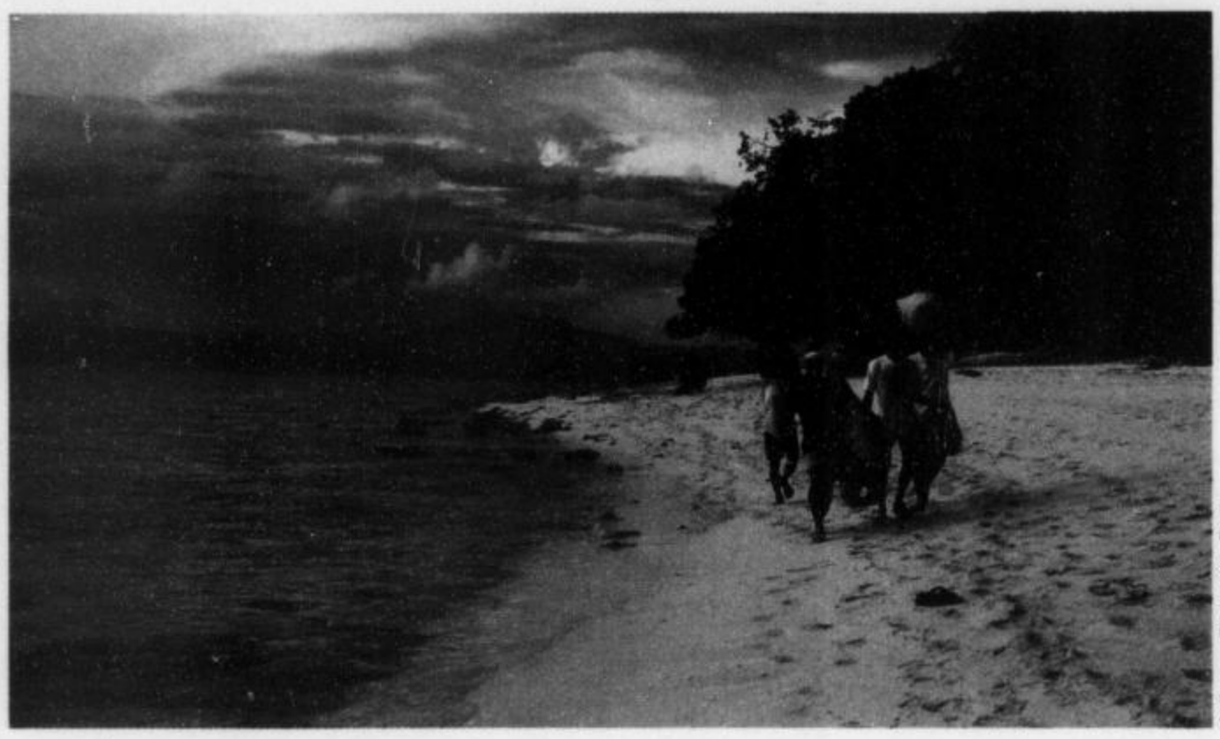
Far right, Mesbahiya madrasah during restoration.

Greenwatch

Palawan, the Philippines' last frontier

by France Bequette



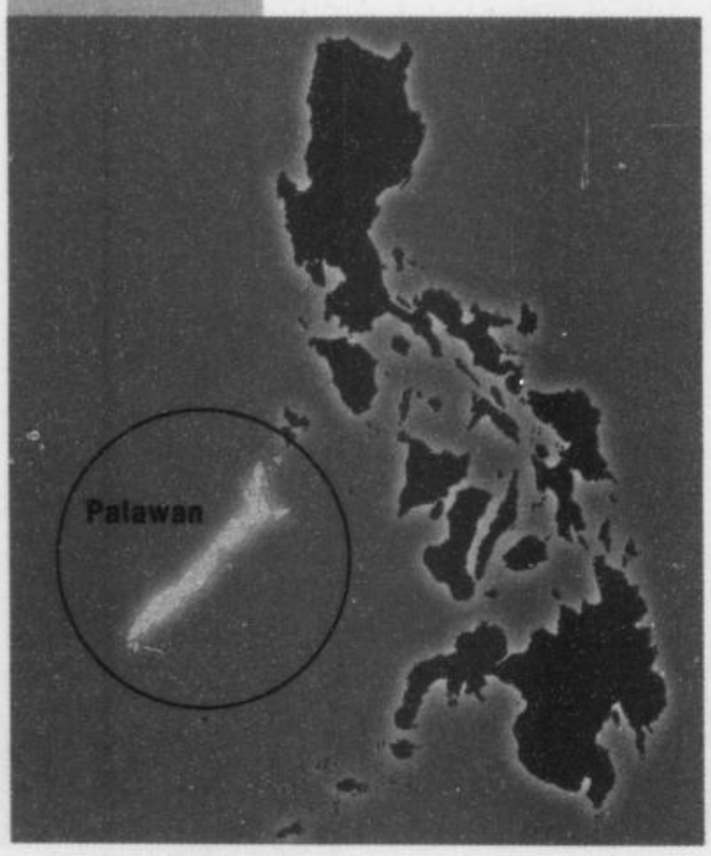
© France Bequette, Paris

Ursula Island, one of the 1,768 islands in Palawan Province, is a bird sanctuary and a wildlife reserve. Author France Bequette and environmentalist friends collected 120 kilos of wastes from its beaches in a single day.

In Puerto Princesa, capital of the Philippine province of Palawan, the new town hall offers a panoramic view over Honda Bay, the turquoise blue sea and a string of islands bordered by white sandy shores. The presence of a rusting and heavily loaded logging truck right in front of the building strikes a jarring note. It has been parked there deliberately. The massive logs, cut illegally, were seized with the truck and put on show to remind the inhabitants of Palawan island that logging in virgin forest is now strictly forbidden.

Palawan, the largest of 1,768 islands that make up the province of the same name, is dubbed the "last frontier" because of its location on the southwestern edge of the Philippine archipelago, not far from Borneo. Covering approximately 14,000 km² and stretching eight to 40 kilometres across, the island consists of a 425-kilometre-long mountain range (highest peak 2,085 metres above sea level) and plains covering about 118,350 hectares.

From the air, the island looks very green, seemingly covered by lush vegetation. But appearances can be deceptive. The fate of Palawan's forest is a snapshot of what has been happening in the Philippines since logging in virgin forest was banned in 1991. According to the current Under Secretary of State for the Environment, Palawan lost 19,000 hectares of forest every year between 1977 and 1988. At this rate, the island might have been stripped of more than 50 per cent of its 780,000-hectare forest cover within 20 years.



The fight to save the forest

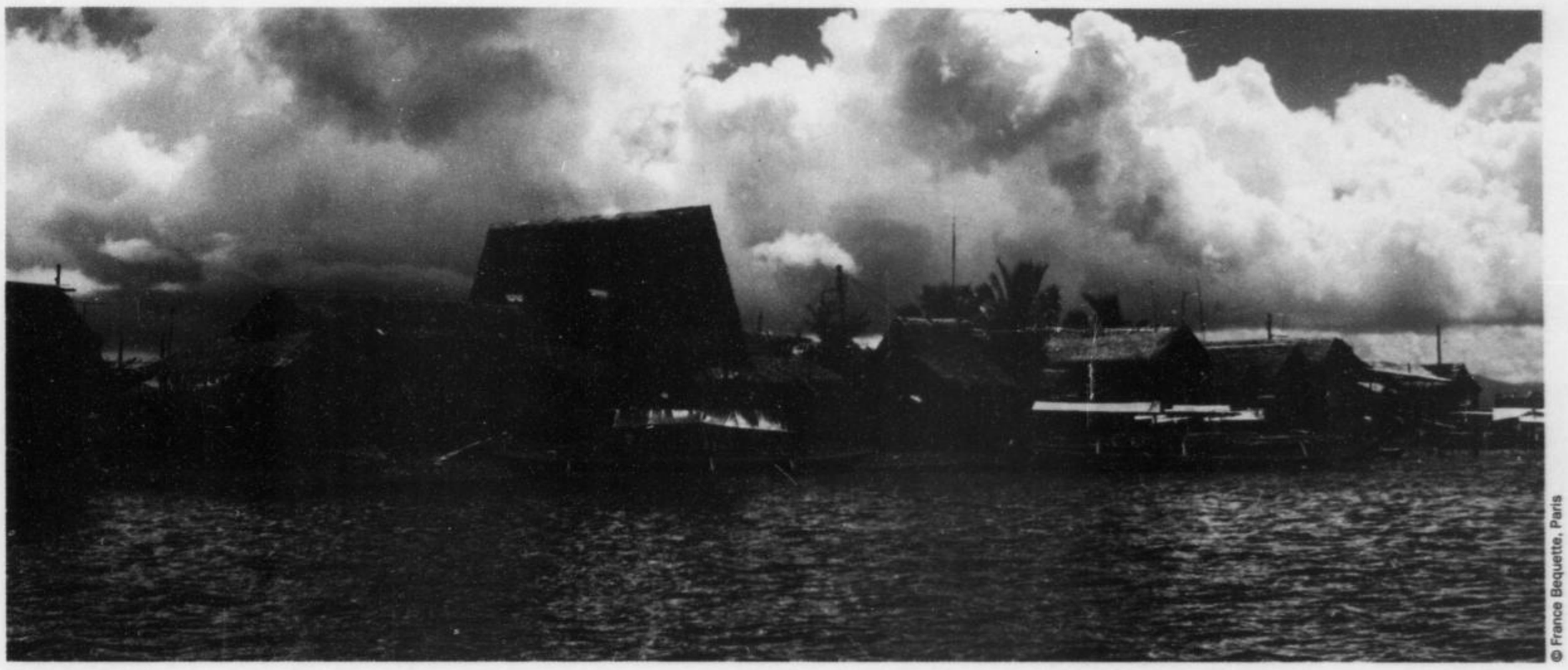
Despite the important economic interests bound up with the logging trade, ecologists launched a campaign in 1988 and soon mobilized public opinion in favour of defending the forest. A leading environmental group, the Haribon ["King of the Birds"] Foundation (named for the Monkey-eating Eagle, an endangered Philippine species), drafted a petition calling for a total logging ban. It collected one million signatures and was presented to former President Corazón Aquino. Three years later, logging was banned by law. A battle had been won, but not the war. In the late 1980s, illegal timber exports were estimated to total about $800 million annually, approximately four times the officially recorded earnings from forest-product exports.

Illegal logging is still going on today. Near the truck placed symbolically in front of Puerto Princesa town hall, the police pile up confiscated loads of timber. The ecologically minded *Palawan Sun* newspaper reported that in the space of two months earlier this year, authorities on the west coast seized timber with a retail value of 381,196 pesos ($15,250).

Deforestation can have far-reaching and devastating consequences, as Palawan's governor Salvador P. Socrates stressed when he visited two towns ravaged by flash floods in September 1995. "Our problem is that there are no more trees to stop the water from coming down the mountain," he said. Besides provoking floods, deforestation removes the fine layer of earth covering the mountainside. Swept away by water, the silt cascades from denuded lands into the island's fishing grounds and settles on coral reefs, which in turn are suffocated.

Dynamite and cyanide

A danger of another kind is threatening Palawan's marine life, renowned for its beauty and great



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The little fishing port of Santa Lourdes, on Honda Bay, has recently been a victim of mercury contamination from a nearby mine.

variety of algae, fish, molluscs and shellfish. A number of fishermen in the area are using dynamite and cyanide, two illegal and destructive practices. Dynamite kills fish but also damages coral reefs. Cyanide paralyzes fish so that they can be caught alive and then sent by plane in water-tanks, three tons at a time, in order to supply aquariums or restaurants in the Far East, where the consumption of certain fish such as *lapulapu* is believed to bring prosperity and longevity.

In Hong Kong, random tests for cyanide carried out on live fish sold in restaurants have shown levels below the permissible amount set by the World Health Organization for drinking water. But whether eating fish caught using cyanide is 100% safe still remains to be proved. In 1987 the Hong Kong government banned cyanide fishing in its territorial waters, but the problem has not gone away.

In Palawan the law in this field is also difficult to enforce, despite heavy sentences for offenders. In March 1996, six dynamite fishermen, locally known as *bumbongeros*, were arrested in Cuyo with 80 kilograms of fish and sentenced to 20 years in prison. The same month, 21 cyanide users were given ten-year sentences.

The Tubbataha Reefs national marine park has not been spared. Located 180 kilometres southeast of Palawan in the middle of the Sulu sea, it stretches over 33,200 hectares. It was created in 1988 and proclaimed a World Heritage Site in 1993. Every year, visiting divers from all over the world observe the damage caused by destructive fishing practices around the two atolls lying at the heart of the marine park, which is exceptional on account of its abundant and highly diverse corals (300 types) and 400 species of fish. A research and marine ranger station has been set up to chase poachers and illegal fishermen. A patrol team of eleven is stationed in Tubbataha for two months at a time. Their living conditions are tough and funding is tight, despite backing from several organizations, including the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) and Conservation International.

Protective measures

Created in 1992, the PCSD established an Environmentally Critical Areas Network in order to regulate and control the use and management of the province's natural resources. A mine exploited near Honda Bay, for example, caused mercury poisoning in fish and shellfish. Several inhabitants of the small port of Santa Lourdes were also affected. The mine was closed and a long-term plan was adopted to provide health care for the villagers and to find alternative means of subsistence to fishing.

In an effort to encourage preservation, the network is also seeking to make forest dwellers the owners of their environment. The PCSD is studying the possibilities of delivering ancestral ownership certificates to three indigenous peoples, the Batah, the Tagbanuas and the Palawan. All live in upland areas and practise slash and burn agriculture. They also hunt, extract resin from almaciga (which yields a type of copal), exploit rattan and harvest wild honey. In 1995, a scheme to protect Palawan's tropical forest was finally drawn up. Among the sites included in the plan are the St. Paul Subterranean River National Park (known for its magnificent underground river) and its adjacent ▶

FRANCE BEQUETTE
is a Franco-American journalist specializing in environmental questions.

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Mangroves on Snake Island, in Honda Bay.

communities, as well as those around the Irawan watershed near Puerto Princesa.

In these last two vicinities, the *Pista y Ang Kageban*, or Festival of the Forests, has been celebrated for the last six years on 23 June. At this year's event, 30,000 people led by Edward Hagedorn, Puerto Princesa's outspoken mayor and environmental activist, arrived at dawn to plant 100,000 tree seedlings of different varieties, thus bringing to 700,000 the total number of trees planted in the capital and its surrounding area. Founded in 1970, Puerto Princesa well and truly lives up to its claim of being a "clean and green" city. As for the island of Palawan, it has been a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve since 1990, as the maps handed out by the tourist office point out. This distinction is, however, news to most of the island's inhabitants.

What is certain is that Palawan has narrowly avoided an ecological catastrophe. The last frontier faces many threats but it is spared from violence, mushrooming concrete constructions and pollution. It can only be hoped that the developing tourist industry will not harm the local culture, the luxuriant vegetation, the rivers and crystal-clear cascades, the endless beaches and an underwater world that is among the most beautiful in the world. ■

Papering the desert green

Carlos Yruretagoyena is a trained oceanographer, and on the face of it there was nothing except his scientific background and his love of nature to suggest that one day he would set up an environmentally-focused research department in one of Mexico's largest domestic-use paper factories, the San Francisco paper works in Mexicali. When he asked if he could do some work on the factory's wastes, his boss raised no objection and Carlos went ahead.

Paper factories produce liquid (65%) and solid (35%) wastes. Once dry, the wastes consist of 5% water, 63% cellulose fibres and 32% mineral ash. Their pH (a measure of the acid or alkaline content of soil) varies between 7 and 8.7, the toxic residues they contain do not exceed permitted norms, and they contain no pathogenic agents liable to pollute the environment. Because of these factors, Carlos thought they could be used for soil enrichment.

He ran a number of experiments to demonstrate that the wastes encourage seed germination and the growth of seedlings, that they can improve the mechanics of soils and lighten heavy earth, and that their moisture-retaining capacity leads to considerable water savings.

The wastes are dried and then crushed into granules no larger than three centimetres in diameter (too compact a texture would suffocate plants). Next, the granules are mixed with various kinds of organic and geological matter (in a proportion not exceeding 50% of the total weight) based on dried cattle manure, clay, burnt wood debris and fodder plants. The blend is left to compost for 30 days then spread in cardboard trays and seeded. The technique is simple and has many advantages: the mix is lightweight, easy to handle and rich in raw materials.

Another experiment proved that subsoil composed of untreated residues from paper-making retained water better than a control plot of ordinary earth, its retentive capacity doubling between depths of 8 to 30 centimetres.

The crops that have already been planted are clearly in good health. Flowers, vegetables and fruit trees are growing fast and well. If the value of these experiments is recognized, Carlos has plans to reforest the desert at low cost. He is convinced that his technique can be useful to everyone involved in the fight against desert encroachment. ■

THUMBNAIL GUIDE TO THE WORLD'S WETLANDS

Comprehensive information on the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, can be found in an excellent short guide, "The Ramsar Convention Manual". The Manual, compiled and edited by T.J. Davis and published by the Convention Bureau, is aimed at a wide readership and is available in the Convention's 3 official working languages, English, French and Spanish. Although they are remarkable repositories of biological diversity and cultural heritage, wetlands are among the environments most threatened by drainage, drought, pollution and over-exploitation of resources.

The Manual is available (price £21.50) from IUCN Publications Services Unit, 219c Huntington Road, Cambridge CB3 ODL, United Kingdom. Tel: 44 1223 277 894; Fax: 44 1223 277 175; email: iucn-psu@wcmc.org.uk)

Ramsar Bureau, rue Mauverney 28, CH 1196, Switzerland.
Tel: 41 22 999 01 70.
Fax: 41 22 999 01 69. Telex: 41 96 24.
E-mail: ramsar@hq.iucn.ch.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

Chromolaena odorata, a creeping grass from Central America that was introduced into Nigeria around 1936 as soil cover, is now causing large-scale agricultural losses in Côte d'Ivoire. In favourable agro-climatic conditions, the grass can spread from 20 to 50 kilometres per year, stifling all the plants on its way. It is already responsible for a 30% drop in cocoa, coffee and palm oil production. It robs heveas of the water they need and slows down their latex production by one to two years. But harmful though it is to biodiversity, the plant does have some advantages. It is a good fertilizer and is also used to treat the eyes, stomach

B. Rebouleau © Jacana, Paris

pains and wounds. Given the high cost of herbicides, the best way to fight the damaging grass is to raise insects that consume it, then let them loose in the invaded zones.

RABBITS ON THE RUN

In 1975, hunters released a male and female rabbit into the Balagne maquis in Corsica. Twenty years later, local farmers are facing a veritable takeover. The rapidly proliferating rabbits are gnawing at roots and bark, destroying pastures, cereal crops, fodder, young olive plants, shrubs and trees. The future of sheep farming is also threatened. So far none of the options considered for getting rid of the intruders—hunting, traps, poison, fire—has worked. Now, the representative of the French National Institute of Agronomic Research (INRA) in Corsica has been asked to come up with a plan of action that respects the fragile balance of the island's ecosystem.

NO VISA FOR THE WHITE RHINO

Three of the 14 white rhinoceros living in Garamba National Park in northern Zaire, a site registered on UNESCO's World Heritage List, were shot by poachers at the beginning of the year. In 1984, there were 1,300 white rhinos. Fearing the species' extinction, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) asked Zaire's head of state for permission to transfer the last survivors to the United States, but he refused and called instead for more logistical support to protect the rhinos on their home ground. The Park, created in 1938 and located on the border with Sudan, is the last natural refuge of this extremely rare species. Its guards are not even armed.

MINING SETBACK

Deposits of titanium, a strong, lightweight metal used in the defence and aviation industries have been discovered on the eastern shores of Lake St. Lucia in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal region. The area, which is covered by old-growth forests, is a wetland protected by the Ramsar Convention. A mining company applied to the government for "urgent permission" to strip mine the area's titanium-rich dunes but a campaign by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the St. Lucia Alliance Network blocked the project. An environmental impact assessment concluded that strip mining would have catastrophic consequences for the region's abundant wildlife. What's more, the South African government is seeking to have St. Lucia registered on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

P. Eranian © Sygma, Paris

UNDER THE VOLCANO

The French island of La Réunion, in the Indian Ocean, may one day draw some of its fresh water supplies from beneath an active volcano, Piton de la Fournaise. Geophysicists from the French Scientific Research Institute for Development Co-operation (ORSTOM) have been probing the volcano's southern flank using the audio-magnetotelluric method, which analyses natural electric and magnetic signals and can measure the conductivity of soils up to a depth of one kilometre. The ORSTOM prospectors discovered a 250-metre-thick layer of fresh water 200 metres down, above a layer of salt water. These techniques using light easy-to-handle equipment are well suited to difficult prospecting conditions on volcanic slopes.

PICTURE-BOOK LANDSCAPES

The Swiss Fund for Landscape Protection, created in 1991 and endowed with 50 million Swiss francs, supports innovative projects in the field of landscape protection and management. In 1995, it received 200 applications, 91 of which have been processed. They include a scheme in the canton of Valais to restore *bisses*, small mountain streams diverted into channels to irrigate meadows, and measures to safeguard orchards and hedges, reconstitute watercourses and protect marshlands in the Jura canton. Another project focuses on restoring *tavaillon* (wood-tile) roofs in the Fribourg and Vaud cantons.

MINIATURE ARCTIC SURVIVOR

The lemming, a small rodent weighing barely 80 grams, is found from Greenland to Alaska and from Scandinavia to northern Canada. It feeds on grass and tiny willows that grow in the tundra. In some years, up to one ton of these small mammals can be found per square kilometre. When food is short, their number, and hence that of their predators, drops sharply. This rise and fall in their population follows three to four year cycles.

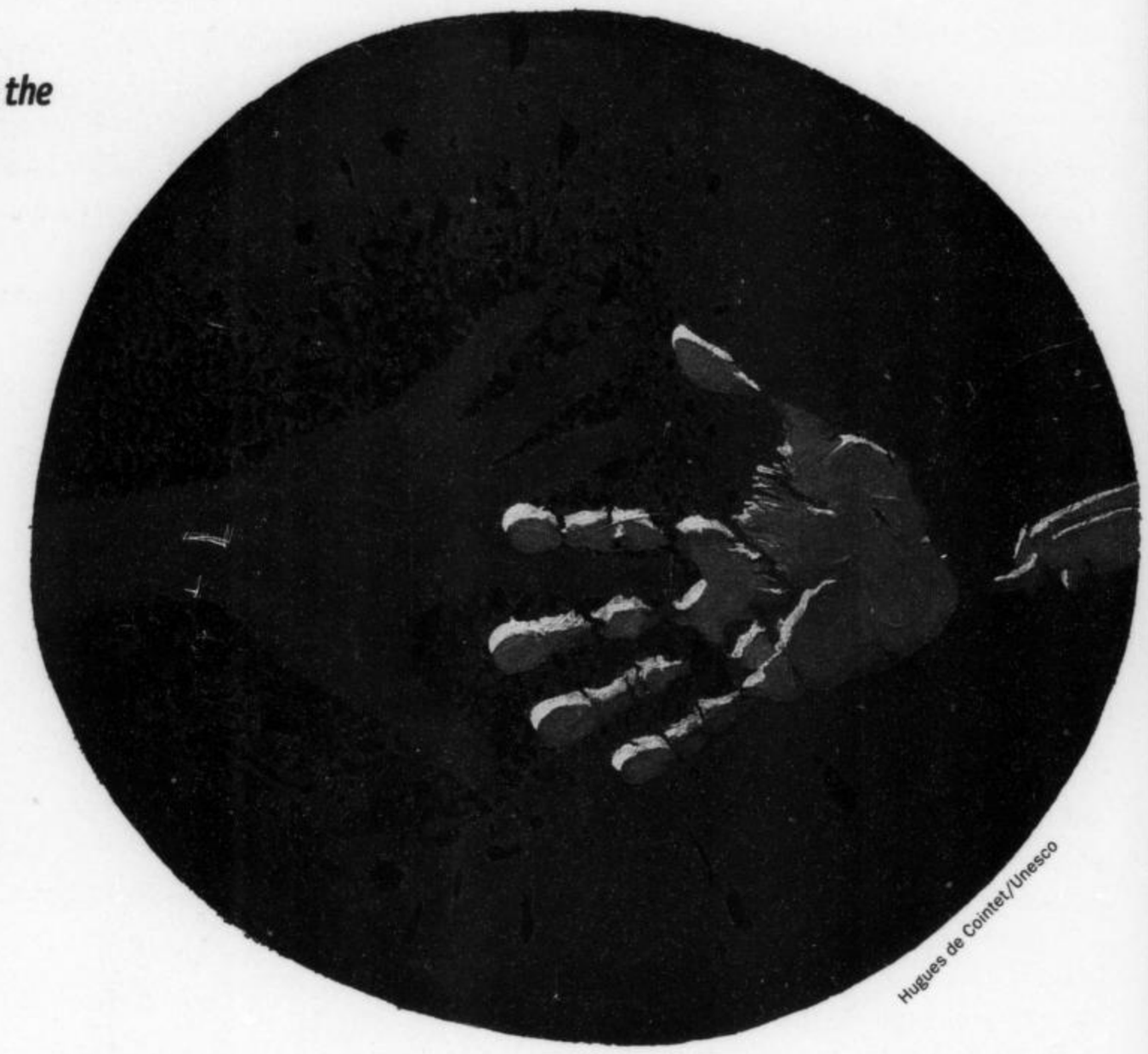
S. Cordier © Jacana, Paris

The second UNESCO philosophy forum

Who are we?

by Géraldine Schimmel

Earlier this year, UNESCO's Paris Headquarters was the scene of a four-day intellectual marathon during which philosophers, sociologists, biologists, historians, jurists, writers, political scientists and artists from all over the world met on the occasion of UNESCO's Second Philosophy Forum and endeavoured to answer the question "Who are we?". Here Géraldine Schimmel presents a round-up of some of the salient issues raised at the Forum (27-30 March 1996), which was organized by Ayyam Sureau of UNESCO's Philosophy Division and a panel of six thinkers.



Hugues de Cointet/Unesco

To those who might think this theme somewhat out-of-date I would point out immediately that the question is not "Who am I?" or "What are we?" but "*Who* are *we?*" It is a trick question. Although it does not directly raise the issue of identity or human nature, it constantly implies it. It impinges on the notion of collective identity and therefore of otherness: who am I to the other, who is the other to me, and, together, who are we? What is it that links us all together to the point where it is possible to talk of human community and, linked in this way, what future are we heading for?

This multifaceted question is not specific to any particular discipline, but every discipline can contribute part of an answer. It is a moral and social question, but has political overtones. A human community wonders what constitutes its identity. What is meant by "we"?

A community of communities

In the view of Richard Rorty (United States), a member of the Forum's Advisory Board, the expression "we" is meaningless unless it is part of a realistic and just project that offers everyone a future. But this future, because it is increasingly unlikely, weakens our collective identity. It is pointless to believe in a moral community if the world is divided by an unbridgeable gap into two camps, the poor and the rich. What meaning can the notion of a moral community have when almost 1.5 billion human beings live in a state of total destitution without their plight arousing any real world solidarity? Is that solidarity even possible? In Rorty's view, regarding others as members of the same moral community presupposes not only that one is prepared to help them, but that one has the means to do so.

Here, the word "we" is consigned to the chilly universe of economic realities. Is this pessimism totally justified?

Richard Posner (United States) suggested that a political community is defined chiefly by feelings of altruism, which tempers competitiveness between its members and turns it into virtuous emulation. There can be no human community without social justice and equal rights. Human beings have shown that they are capable of making the transition from "I" to "we". Many societies are now more egalitarian and more just than they used to be. It is surely reasonable to believe that in time the "we" will progress.

Irrespective of economic considerations,

Daniel C. Dennett (United States) argued that there is room for a rational exchange between human beings that can pave the way to progress towards a global moral community. Angèle Kremer-Marietti (France) accepted that the idea of a global democracy, a "community of communities", is Utopian, but believed that it is a goal we should aim for. In a world where interdependence is continually becoming stronger, and where exchanges—trade, communications, migration flows and epidemics—are taking on a global dimension, it would be unrealistic to suppose that rich countries can isolate themselves from poor countries. Although twentieth-century examples of totalitarianism may cast doubt on the feasibility of an egalitarian society, we can at least aim for fairness.

For, as Vitaly Chelichev (Russia) pointed out, quoting the American philosopher John Rawls, justice is not about egalitarianism, but equity. The rich can get richer as long as that leads to some extent to the poorest getting richer. Equity would in that case seem to be above all a rational quest for a less and less unjust society. If this is accepted, the political "we" can exist in societies which are to some degree inegalitarian. But there are certain definable tolerance thresholds beyond which economic inequality may jeopardize political stability.

Perhaps the moral community we are trying to define is neither a community of trust, as Rorty suggests, nor a defiant "we", to paraphrase Annette Baier (New Zealand), but simply a community of common interests. The human species has discovered that it is held together by a new bond, a bond emanating from its own fragility. The earth's equilibrium is under threat and the shadow of Malthusianism still looms, as Nicole Morgan (Canada) observed. The image of our small planet being in danger has created a new form of solidarity between its inhabitants: the survival of us all is at stake. This responsibility brings a fresh intensity to the notion "we".

Catherine Chevallier/UNESCO

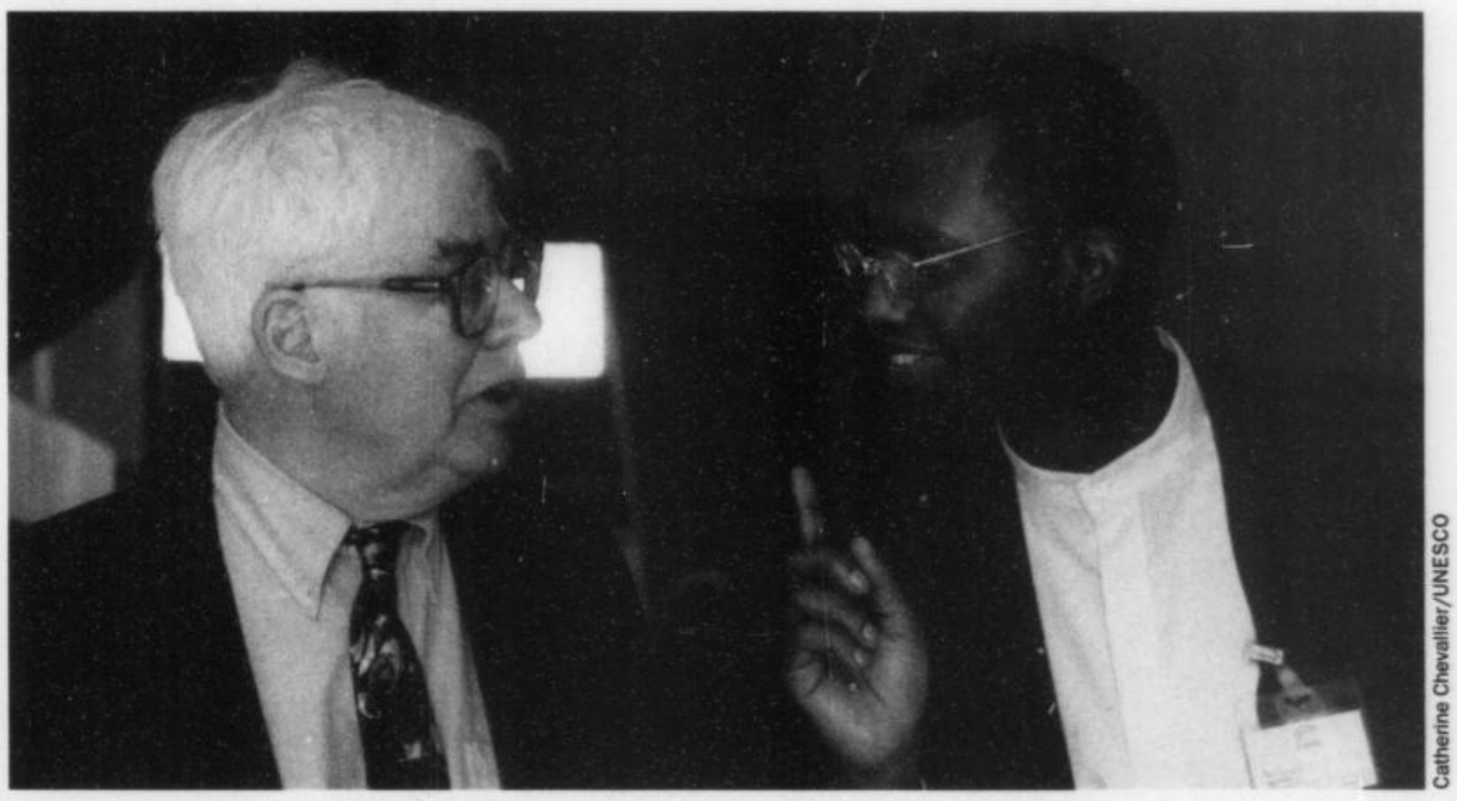
French geneticist Albert Jacquard (left) and French philosopher Lucien Sève (right).

Federating differences

To use the word "we" is first and foremost to accept other people's right to exist. In the words of Albert Jacquard (France), only the collective gives humankind its dignity. "I" is above all the link I build up with others. It is my membership of a community which has the power to make the "I" emerge. This argument was echoed by Yirmiahu Yovel (Israel), for whom we are transient creatures who try to transcend our existence by tearing ourselves away from meaninglessness, finite beings who desperately strive to overcome our finitude. Identity provides us with a metaphysical anchor. Yovel contrasted static identities (national, racial, religious), which constrict and imprison the individual, with dynamic identities, which enable human beings to belong to several groups at the same time. But in any case, the "I" exists only thanks to the "we".

The role of the Other is thus crucial to the definition of the Self, especially in cases where the Other is someone who does not belong to my group. This difference can generate positive competitiveness and become a source of energy and creativity; but it cannot be fertile unless there are ethical standards and political institutions that guarantee mutual recognition and preclude all forms of intolerance. The idea of federation, in the sense of a veritable association of nations, was regarded as a possible solution both by Yovel and by Alain Finkielkraut (France), who cited Kant's project for universal peace, which holds that international relations will only emerge from the state of nature through development of the idea of federation.

To say "we" is to recognize the Other in his or her dignity as a human being. This recognition seems to be reflected *par excellence* in the universalist discourse of human



Catherine Chevallier/UNESCO

American philosopher Richard Rorty (left) and Cameroonian philosopher Gaston-Paul Effa (right).

GÉRALDINE SCHIMMEL
(France).

Catherine Chevallier/UNESCO

Russian epistemologist Vitaly Chelishchev.

rights. It has been seen by some as an instrument of the West's desire for cultural domination, particularly during the colonial period. But it cannot be considered solely as an ideological vehicle remote-controlled by the superpowers with the aim of erasing the specific characteristics of different human communities. Universalism can be adapted to diversity of cultures and, as Pilar Echeverría de Ocariz (Venezuela) argued, it is a guarantee of security for the peoples who support it.

One might ask why universalism should be regarded as incompatible with cultural identities. One reason is the fear that a form of globalization and a certain cultural hegemony may iron out differences using the power of the communications media. Zaki Laïdi (France) stressed that globalization is not an idea, but a process with no symbolic force which may prompt nations to protect their endangered identity. The universal, on the other hand, does not neglect differences; it simply forbids a withdrawal into one's own identity. It is possible to be integrated into the world community without losing a cultural identity, particularly since that identity, according to Egon Gal (Slovakia), does not exist in itself, but is constantly being reshaped by our acts.

History and identity

Attention was now turned to another component of the meaning of the term "we": we are solely because we were. To forget that we are the product of a past and a common history is tantamount to weakening the foundations of our collective identity. Jacques Le Goff (France) insisted on the fact that we consist of many strata. We have constructed ourselves around events which have become identity myths, and to forget them is to deprive our identity of its foundations—thus eroding the foundations of a common future.

But we must distinguish between what forms a constituent part of our identity and what does not. Abdulkarim Sorush (Iran), for example, seemed to think that one of the main shortcomings of European Enlightenment philosophy was that it tried to deny the religious dimension—a dimension which formed an integral part of the Western world's identity. Because it has tried to eliminate all religious features from its collective organization and subjected it to purely secular constraints, the West may have robbed itself of part of its identity and, what is more, lost the ability to understand nations with a religious structure, especially the Islamic world.

How can a collective identity withstand the changes of history? If one is, for example, "a former dissident from a former Eastern-bloc country", as Pedrag Matvejevich (former Yugoslavia and Croatia) described himself, how should one see the future and prepare oneself for it? Matvejevich noted that ideologies based on identity are running out of steam. Who ought we to be if we are no longer what we were? Since the immediate past does not help to construct an identity, should we, as Matthias Middel (Germany) suggested, delve into the past and see if a democratic ideal from the nineteenth century can help us to tackle the problems of the future?

Hence the central question: when do we become aware that the collective "we" exists? Gianni Vattimo (Italy) answered by quoting Walter Benjamin: "The essence of a thing appears in all its truth when it is threatened with extinction." In the same way, awareness of identity seems to be shaped by danger and conflict. Perhaps we resign ourselves to cultural minimalism through fear of this violent conflict. This conflict, necessary though it is to enable the identity to disintegrate and reconstitute itself, needs nevertheless to be channelled and organized. Vattimo took as his example the European Community's process of constructing an identity, which is taking place within the framework of a non-violent conflict. This process is akin to the universalist ideal which aims not to make all nations identical, but to allow them to display their differences on the basis of a universal legal standard.

However, another difficulty has emerged as the twentieth century comes to a close. As Marcel Gauchet (France) explained, "being together" becomes increasingly difficult as the mystery of "being oneself" melts away. On the one hand the individual, who has become the subject of scientific knowledge, seems easier to understand. The cognitive sciences have taught us much about the workings of the mind. On the other hand, there is a crisis of sociological intelligibility, a crisis of societies' capacity to act on themselves, especially since the expectations of socialism came to an end. It has become painfully obvious that despite our mass of knowledge our societies remain impenetrable to us.

So we shall go an asking the question "Who are we?" for some time to come. One only hopes that nations will be capable of overcoming their differences and of reaching a minimum degree of agreement about what they share. ■

Catherine Chevallier/UNESCO

Dorothy Blake of Jamaica (adviser to the Assistant Director-General of WHO, Geneva).

Reflections: **Culture first**

A follow-up article to last month's issue ("Culture and Development: A life worth living") reports on UNESCO's thinking about the cultural dimension of development

by Claude Fabrizio, UNESCO consultant

Development policies based entirely on economic considerations and intended to help the countries of the South to "catch up" with the industrialized nations encountered many setbacks in the 1960s and 1970s. One result of this was the emergence in the 1980s of a new concept, the cultural dimension of development.

This idea, whose importance was recognized by the World Conference on cultural policies held in Mexico City in 1982, is based on the observation that some features of pre-industrial societies are inconsistent with the societal model of industrialized countries and on the belief that these features should be taken into account in development planning.

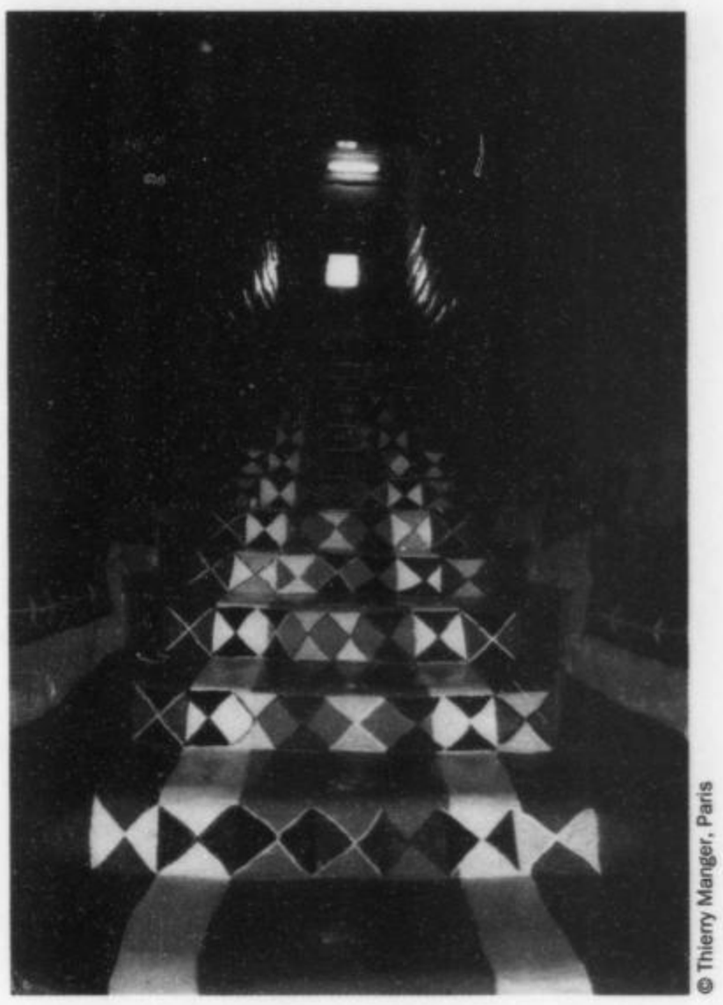
Although the concept was widely acknowledged in 1982, it only really began to influence the working methods of co-operation agencies in the early 1990s, when these bodies began to take account of certain cultural characteristics and to associate local populations more closely with the preparation and execution of field projects.

During this time, the United Nations system was engaged in an appraisal of the qualitative aspects of development which led to the emergence of the concepts of *sustainable development, human development* (for which the United Nations Development Programme became the permanent standard bearer) and, more recently, *social development.*

Meanwhile UNESCO, as part of its activities within the framework of the World Decade for Cultural Development which it had launched jointly with the United Nations, began to study in depth the methods whereby cultural considerations could be integrated into development.

Two major steps

Two important steps must be taken. Firstly, it must be recognized that the interaction between culture and development is the interface of two cultural models, one corresponding to traditional, pre-industrial cultures, and the other (which is often presented as not belonging to any kind of society in particular) corresponding to the dominant industrial culture.



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Secondly, it must be accepted that centralizing, technocratic methods of promoting development must be replaced by more flexible approaches tailored to situations in which countries, populations and communities propose to act on their own account, according to their own needs, possibly with the help of outside institutions.

The importance of two UNESCO flagship projects may be seen in the light of these two obstacles—the work of the World Commission on Culture and Development (as reported in the September 1996 issue of the *UNESCO Courier*) and a methodological project on "The Cultural Dimension of Development".

After carrying out a series of case studies, in 1992 UNESCO began drawing up an inventory of ways and means of integrating cultural factors into development, exploring the full implications of the cultural factors and impacts of development and outlining a new approach to the problem based on analysing development from the cultural point of view.[1] Planning methods are now being reassessed on the basis of this new approach, and the resulting proposals will be published at the end of the year as *A Cultural Approach to Development, Proposals for a Planning Manual.*

An entirely new perspective

The new approach involves a complete change of perspective. The planning process now starts on the ground and moves up to the financial and other decision-making centres. Projects are justified essentially in situations (previously called "contexts") in which problems raised by local people call for outside intervention. The participation process is thus turned upside down. Local populations have now become the chief players, and the people from outside have to establish new partnerships with them.

There is no longer any room for models of change designed in a vacuum. The variety of cultures and situations must be matched by a corresponding variety of approaches to development with a human face. Excessively rigorous timetables clash with the variety of rhythms that are found in different societies. They are only of interest to intellectually rigid institutions which allocate their resources according to results which may not necessarily correspond to the underlying effects of innovation on different human groups.

If these institutions were to set up guidelines associated with conditions that countries requesting institutional support must meet, planning could be much more easily adapted to the unique cultural dynamics of each society. Projects would then respond to needs expressed at grass roots level, to the mobilization of local people, and to an internal rationale of continuity and change.

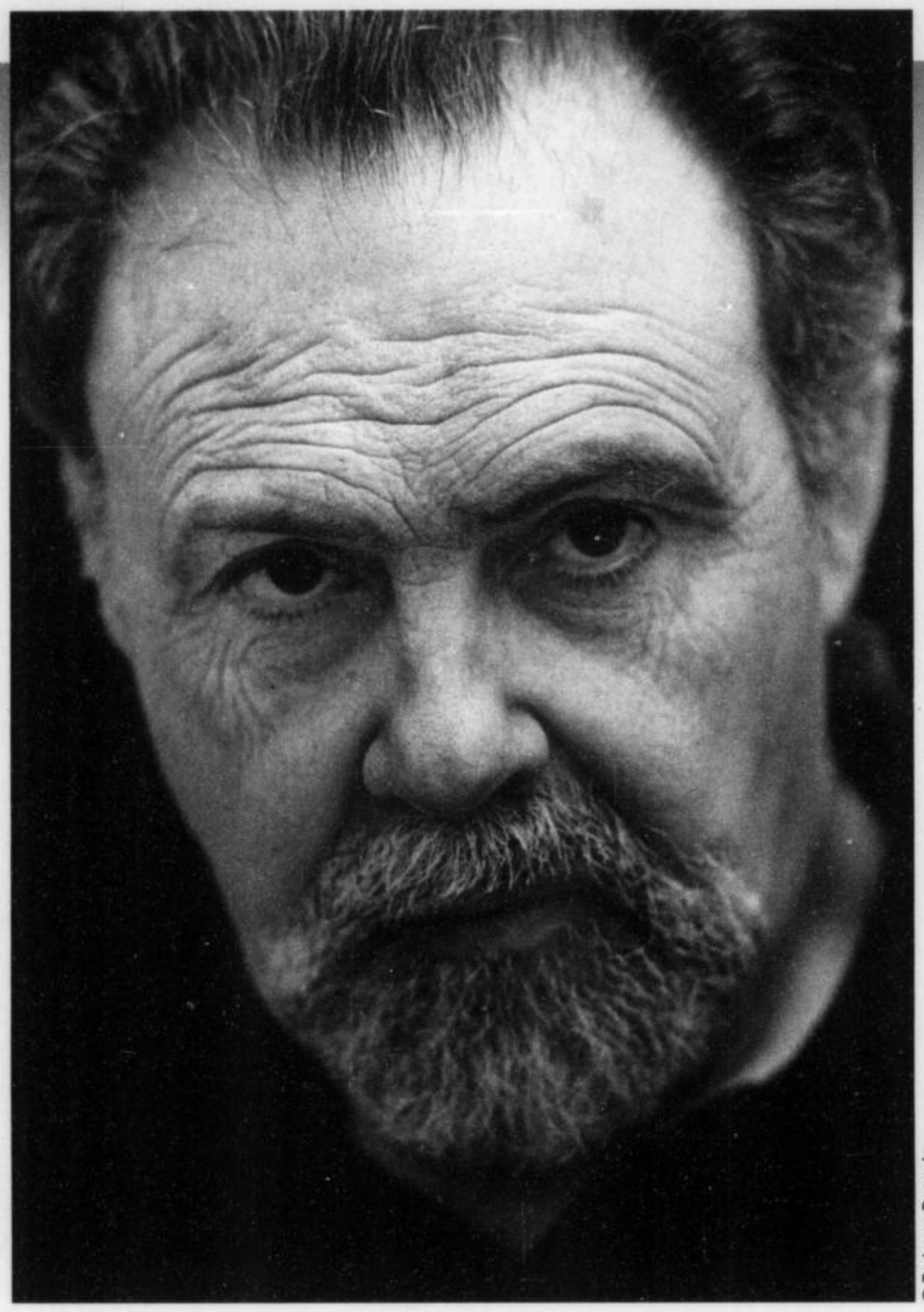
These proposals correspond to questions which are increasingly being asked, in various forms, in all the institutions of the United Nations. ■

1 See *The Cultural Dimension of Development. Towards a Practical Approach.* UNESCO Publishing, Paris, 1995.

LISTENING

Isabelle Leymarie
talks to

Juan Carlos Cáceres



© Tadeusz Pacsula

Instrumentalist, singer and painter, Juan Carlos Cáceres is a one-man history of the Argentine tango, vividly evoking its pathos and sensuality in paintings, pastels and his latest recording, *Sudacas*. Here he describes some unusual and little-known facets of this enduringly popular musical form, the memorable characters who have contributed to it, and the many musical influences that have fashioned it since the 19th century.

■ **Isabelle Leymarie: What is the tango and where did you get your passion for it?**

Juan Carlos Cáceres: The tango is one of Latin America's richest kinds of music. Even the older pieces are sometimes surprisingly modern and harmonically adventurous, not to mention work by more recent composers like Astor Piazzolla.

I come from Buenos Aires, which is the home of the tango and has an extraordinary jazz school and excellent musicians. As a child I spent a lot of time listening to the radio. At that time there was a programme on the tango of the 1920s, but they also played recordings from the last century—what they call today the tango of the Old Guard. I can still remember the programme's opening announcement, which said: "Tango of the Old Guard, from the candombe to the habanera, from the habanera to the fandango, from the fandango to the milonga, from the milonga to the tango." They also broadcast a famous tango called *El Porteñito*[1]. Old-style tango was played with anything the musicians could lay their hands on. It was a two-speed tango, often played by neighbourhood brass bands, or municipal or military brass bands performing in bandstands in town squares. One of the first important tango recordings was made in 1907. The music was recorded in Paris by the brass band of the Republican Guard! I also liked listening to Aníbal Troilo, who in the 1940s was a famous player of the bandonion, a kind of portable harmonium or accordion that is popular in Latin America.

The first tango age stretched from the 1880s to 1920, a time when bandonions were few and far between. The bandonion first turned up in the Rio de la Plata region around 1870 during the war with Paraguay, when a mulatto named Santa Cruz played polkas and mazurkas on it. During this first period all tango musicians were black or mulatto, and the tango was street music, outsiders' music. The whites listened to classical music. Later the tango blended with other types of dance for couples, and its instrumentation developed. Barrel organs, which could easily be taken outside, were ideal for producing bitter-sweet sounds. Brass bands, with their big horns and flutes, played the tango in its most polished form at that time. Trios and quartets made up of such instruments as flutes, clarinets, violins and harps and guitars played it in brothels. Fancy brothels had pianos, and pianists also played ragtime.

■ **I. L.: It is often forgotten that the tango resulted from a meeting between many different cultures.**

J. C. C.: That's right. As early as 1880 it is possible to see links with Brazilian music in the *milonga*, which was sung by the gauchos of the Buenos Aires suburbs and whose bass line shows Cuban influences. Some notes in the tango are also close to those of jazz. People always talk about an input from the United States, but I think it's much more important to emphasize the close ties between the countries of the southern half of South America and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. Argentina has never been the isolated nation it's sometimes thought to have been. The long couplets of the *milonga* were sung by

ISABELLE LEYMARIE
is a Franco-American musicologist.

Even the angels dance the tango

payadores, itinerant singers who accompanied themselves on the guitar. The *milonga* blended with the tango and became the *tango-milonga*. In the 1920s, which are considered to be a golden age of the tango, the violinist Julio De Caro codified this music and defined its colour. Sextets then started to appear, generally consisting of two bandonions, two violins, a piano and a bass.

■ **I. L.: The important contribution from the candombe is also often forgotten when talking about the roots of the tango.**

J.C.C.: There are traces of the *candombe* in *Sudacas*, the record I made recently. You can still hear the influence of this old religious music of the blacks of Rio de la Plata in the strong beat and syncopation of the tango and the *milonga*. Until the 1950s, the tango was deeply rooted in popular culture, and the bands that played in the open air played it with an incredible swing—without amplifiers. The best musicians have always played with a swing, but the tradition of improvization has gone. There was also a particularly erotic version of the tango called the *tango con corte*, which came from one of the figures of the *candombe*. It was danced by the ordinary people, but it was banned. For a while even *lunfardo*, Buenos Aires slang, was forbidden. Then the Argentine middle classes introduced the tango to Europe before the First World War, and it even became fashionable in Russia. The Pope issued a bull forbidding the tango for being too sensual, and Argentine dancers were sent to the Vatican to dance for him in an attempt to persuade him to go back on his decision. In the 1930s the tango lost its bite. A vogue for sung tango came in, with Carlos Gardel as its representative figure. Then came a tango revival in the 1940s. Influenced by North American music, it went from a binary measure to one in four-time. The old repertoire was played again, and Aníbal Troilo kept the phrasing of the *milonga*.

■ **I. L.: How have you managed to pursue a double career as a painter and a musician?**

J.C.C.: I started painting very young (I studied at the Buenos Aires Art School), also playing the piano and the trombone. I was especially fond of the tango and jazz, particularly cool jazz; I liked its romantic side. By the way, after the Second World War, several French musicians settled in Argentina and spread the influence of Django Reinhardt. This gave rise to a unique guitar school in Argentina. In the 1920s several tango musicians also spent some time in the United States. When they returned, they incorporated new jazz chords into their works. After the 1966 coup d'état, I went to Spain, and then settled in France where in 1977 I formed a tango group called Gotán (the word tango in reverse). I was the pianist and arranger. We had an alto violin, a viola, a bandonion, a bass and an electric guitar. We played a lot of original pieces. Then I went through a patch where I couldn't find any musicians I could get along with, and so I spent more time painting. I produced a fresco of Latin America history and I also took some ideas from the French Revolution. In 1989 I went back to music, which had come to be a kind of therapy. I formed a new group called Tangofón with two saxes, a piano, a bass, a bandonion and drums, and I started singing professionally.

© Juan Carlos Cáceres

A painting by Juan Carlos Cáceres.

■ **I. L.: Your painting also expresses the magic of the world of the tango.**

J.C.C.: The tango is still my main source of inspiration. I've painted Carlos Gardel, the bandonionist Astor Piazzolla when he was playing with Aníbal Troilo, whose arranger he was, couples dancing, pimps, dives, brothels and even a canvas showing the tango dancers who went to dance for the Pope. In the lower portion you can see angels dancing the tango in Paradise. ■

1 "The little guy from Buenos Aires." *Ed.*

DISCOGRAPHY:
Sudacas
CD Celluloïd/Mélodie 66969-2

A tiny bubble in the silence of the infinite

by Rabindranath Tagore
Indian writer and poet (1861-1941) Nobel Laureate for Literature (1913)

An apology is due from me for my intrusion into the world of pictures, thus offering a perfect instance of the saying that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. I, as an artist, cannot claim any merit for my courage; for it is the unconscious courage of the unsophisticated, like that of one who walks in dream on a perilous path, who is saved only because he is blind to the risk.

The only training which I had from my young days was training in rhythm, rhythm in thought, rhythm in sound. I came to know that rhythm gives reality to that which is desultory, which is insignificant in itself. And therefore, when the scratches in my manuscript cried, like sinners, for salvation, and assailed my eyes with the ugliness of their irrelevance, I often took more time in rescuing them into a merciful finality of rhythm than in carrying on what was my obvious task.

In the process of this salvage work I came to discover one fact, that in the universe of forms there is a perpetual activity of natural selection in lines, and only the fittest survives which has in itself the fitness of cadence, and I felt that to fit the heterogeneous into the balance of fulfilment is creation itself.

My pictures are my versification in lines. If by chance they are entitled to claim recognition it must be primarily for some rhythmic significance of form which is ultimate, and not for any interpretation of an idea, or representation of a fact.

The world of sound is a tiny bubble in the silence of the infinite. The Universe has its language of gesture, it talks in the voice of pictures and dance. Every object in this world proclaims in the dumb signal of lines and colours the fact that it is not a mere logical abstraction or a mere thing for use, but is unique in itself, it carries the miracle of its existence.

There are countless things which we know but do not recognize in their own dignity of truth, independent of the fact that they are injurious or beneficial. It is enough that a flower exists as a flower, but my cigarette has no other claim upon me for recognition than as being subservient to my smoking habit.

But there are other things which in the dynamic quality of rhythm or character make us insistently acknowledge the fact that they are. In the book of creation they are the sentences that are underlined with coloured pencil and we cannot pass them by. They seem to cry to us "See, here I am," and our mind bows its head and never questions, "Why are you?"

In a picture the artist creates the language of undoubted reality, and we are satisfied that we see. It may not be the representation of a beautiful woman but that of a humble animal, or of something that has no external credential of truth in nature but only its own inner artistic significance.

People often ask me about the meaning of my pictures. I remain silent even as my pictures are. It is for them to express and not to explain. They have nothing ulterior behind their own appearance for thought to explore and words to describe and if that appearance carried its ultimate worth then they remain. Otherwise they are rejected and forgotten even though they may have some scientific truth or ethical justification.

It is related in the drama of Shakuntala, how one busy morning there stood humbly before the maiden of the forest-hermitage a youthful stranger who did not give his name. Her soul acknowledged him at once without question. She did not know him but only saw him and for her he was the artist God's masterpiece to which must be offered the full value of love.

Days passed by. There came to her gate another guest, a venerable sage who was formidable. And, sure of his claim to a dutiful welcome, proudly he announced, "I am here!" But she did not hear his voice, for it did not carry with it an inherent meaning, it needed a commentary of household virtue, pious words which could assign a sacred value to a guest. Not the value of irresponsible art, but of moral responsibility. Love is kindred to art, it is inexplicable. Duty can be measured by the degree of its benefit, utility by the profit and power it may bring, but art by nothing but itself. There are other factors of life which are visitors that come and go. Art is the guest that comes and remains. The others may be important, but art is inevitable. ■

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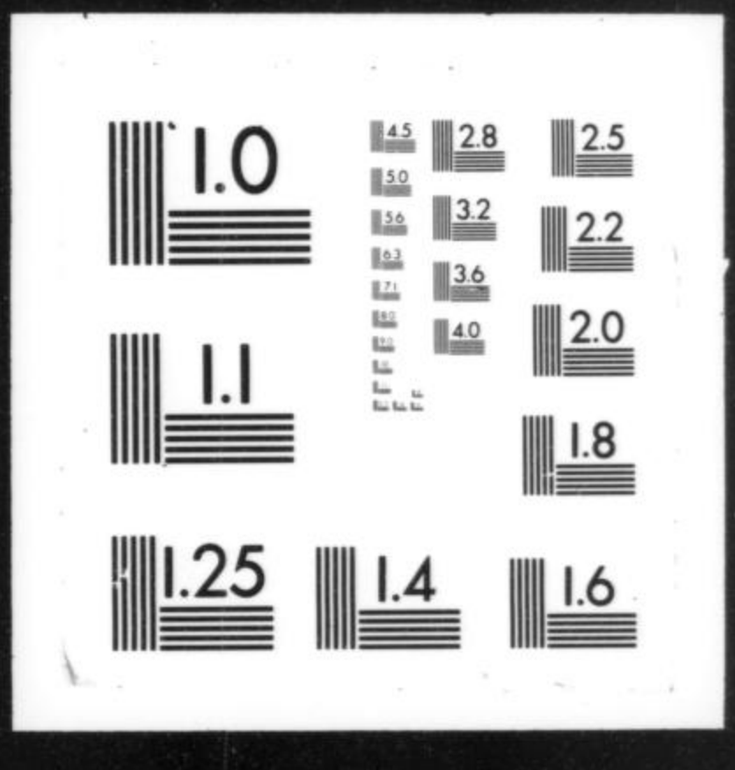
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